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# LETTERS ON STRATEGY

VOL. I

Prince Kraft zu Hohenlohe-Ingelfingen

The  
Wolseley  
Series



# LETTERS ON STRATEGY

VOL. I.

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London: KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER & Co., Ltd.

# LETTERS ON STRATEGY

BY  
GENERAL  
PRINCE KRAFT ZU HOHENLOHE-INGELFINGEN  
7

FORMING THE SECOND VOLUME

OF

**The Wolseley Series**

*EDITED BY*

CAPT. WALTER H. JAMES

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON  
KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER & CO. LTD.  
PATERNOSTER HOUSE, CHARING CROSS ROAD  
1898

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LONDON:  
PRINTED BY GILBERT AND RIVINGTON, LIMITED,  
ST. JOHN'S HOUSE, CLERKENWELL, E.C.

Gibraltar, April 19th, 1897.

DEAR CAPTAIN JAMES,

I HAVE read with interest the list you have sent me of the military works to be published as "The Wolseley Series."

The subjects are wisely chosen, and the authors will be generally accepted as soldiers who are competent to express valuable opinions upon them.

I am much flattered by having my name associated with an undertaking that is designed to improve the professional knowledge of our officers, and I rejoice to feel that under your able editorship its success is assured. In some instances I see you are not only editor but also translator, for which duty, if you will allow me to say so, your intimate knowledge of the German idiom eminently qualifies you.

I hope the officers of her Majesty's army may never degenerate into bookworms. There is happily at present no tendency in that direction, for I am glad to say that this generation is as fond of danger, adventure, and all manly out-of-door sports as its forefathers were. At the same time, all now recognize that the officer who has not studied war as an applied science, and who is ignorant of modern military history, is of little use beyond the rank of Captain. The principle of selection, pure and simple, is gradually being applied to the promotion of all officers, especially in the higher grades. As years go on this system will be more and more rigidly enforced.

It is gratifying to know that a large proportion of our young officers are ambitious, and without doubt there is now many a subaltern who hopes to be a Field-Marshal



or to be shot in the attempt. Experience enables me to warn all these determined men of how small their chance is of ever reaching any great position in the army unless they devote many of their spare hours every week to a close study of tactics and strategy as dealt with in the best books upon recent wars.

In this series of military works from the pens of first-class writers, the military student will find ample material to assist him in fitting himself for high command, and in the interest of the Empire and of the army I earnestly hope he will avail himself of it.

I know how truly this work is undertaken as a labour of love by you as editor and by all who are helping you. But I also know that you and they will feel amply repaid if it assists the young officer to learn the science of his profession and, in doing this, to improve the fighting value of the service, to the true interests of which we are one and all sincerely devoted.

Believe me to be,

Very truly yours,

WOLSELEY.

## THE WOLSELEY SERIES.

THE object of this series of books is to place before British officers and others translations of the best foreign military books in an English dress. It is also intended to add original works on portions of our military history which have, hitherto, been somewhat neglected. The great part played in national life by the armies of continental nations, has given rise to a much larger military literature than exists in England. The incessant struggle for supremacy has led to the production by master-minds of treatises on various parts of the art of war, which are of the highest importance, but many of which have hitherto only existed in their own language. It will be the aim of this series to make them available to English readers.

England has been engaged in no great war since the beginning of the century. It follows, therefore, that both strategy and tactics have been more widely treated by foreign authors than by our own, not only for the reason set forth above, but also because having usually taken a personal part in them they are naturally more interested therein.

It is sometimes urged that lessons of continental conflicts are in no wise useful to ourselves; this is ridiculous. The guiding principles of the operations of war are the same, whether they are conducted against civilized or savage foes. If our army were prepared only to meet the latter it need scarcely be maintained in its present form, but no one can say with our widespread

Empire that we shall not be called upon to meet civilized opponents. If we are able to deal with them, we shall certainly have no difficulty in defeating savages, for it is by the training and discipline which render troops fit to meet those of their own state of civilization that they prove superior to the savage when they meet him in the field.

Strategy is the same, whether used against Arabs or Frenchmen. The tactics employed differ as the weapons of the enemy differ. But the soldiers trained to meet the highest class of opponents are, *ipso facto*, better qualified to deal with the inferior.

This series, therefore, will contain translations of well-known foreign writers, and it will also contain original English works dealing with the kind of warfare in which we are most frequently engaged, and with certain special phases of British military experience which have hitherto been somewhat inadequately dealt with. The history of British arms is replete with interest and is second to none in moving incidents of gallantry. Many of these have already been recorded, but the actual lessons to be learned from them have not always been systematically treated. It is hoped, as this series progresses, to do so, and to secure for future generations the practical deductions to be made from the deeds of British soldiers. A list of the volumes already arranged for will be found at the beginning of this book, and it will be the aim of the editor to add from time to time such works only as seem of the first importance in the theory and record of military achievement.

WALTER H. JAMES.

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## INTRODUCTION.

THE late Prince Kraft zu Hohenlohe Ingelfingen was not only known as one of Prussia's ablest soldiers, but also as one of the best of German military authors. During the wars of 1866 and 1870 he commanded the Artillery of the Guard, and in the latter portion of the Franco-German struggle he directed the artillery operations against Paris. After the termination of the war he held several high positions of command.

His best-known works are :—

“On the Employment of Artillery in combination with the other Arms,” translated by the late Major Clarke.

“Letters on Infantry, Cavalry, and Artillery,” which have been ably rendered into English by Colonel Walford, Royal Artillery.

“Conversations on Cavalry,” recently translated by Captain Maude, late Royal Engineers.

The “Letters on Strategy,” which are contained in this volume, form an able treatise on this portion of the art of war. They are not to be taken up lightly, or to be dipped into here and there, but conscientiously studied they form a valuable means of instruction in strategical matters, and for this reason they are placed before the British military reader.

Plans I. and II. have been re-drawn from the best authorities. A full table of contents has also been added which will enable the reader to find any special point he may wish to refer to.

WALTER H. JAMES.



# LETTERS ON STRATEGY

## Part I.

### FIRST LETTER.

#### INTRODUCTION.

#### WHAT IS STRATEGY?

You ask me to write to you about strategy in the same way as I have explained to you my views on the tactics of the three arms. I confess that I accede to your wish somewhat unwillingly. It might appear easier to write on the events of strategy than on those of tactics, as the latter are fought in the open under the pressure of events when life is the stake, so that the cold criticism of the closet, which does not take the incidents of the fight into consideration, can be itself criticized, whereas strategical decisions are as a rule come to in the cabinet. Besides, the greater part of the strategist's business is done by correspondence, and hence it might be said that theorist and practitioner are both alike in the same situation. And yet the practical strategist needs a special qualification which the theorist can dispense with, viz., strength of mind, which, undeterred by the knowledge that the lives of thousands depend on his decisions, will enable him calmly to decide what to do in the midst of disturbing elements. It is true that the tactician feels the same responsibility, but not in the same degree. He is ordered to attack, and has only to determine how he may succeed with the smallest loss possible. He has no choice but to do as he is told. But the strategist

decides whether a battle is to be fought or not ; on his fiat depends the lives of thousands. The tactician is in danger when his decision is come to, or goes into it when carrying it out. He runs the same risk as those he leads, and at the worst may pay for his error with his life. The strategist on the other hand but rarely shares the personal risk of the thousands or hundreds of thousands he sends into danger. As a rule he must remain far from it. Indeed, it would be a grievous error were he to jeopardize the continuity of his plans by exposing his life to the same danger that those under him must run. Very rarely, perhaps only at the supreme moment of a decisive battle, when all depends on his personal influence with his troops, is the strategist justified in entering the zone of actual fighting.

Varying circumstances, and the uncertainty of the information about the enemy, often make it hard even for a good strategist to hold fast to his original resolutions and to carry out the necessary steps for their execution. The views of the strategist may often become obscured by the cloud of contradictory reports about the enemy, and so what was before perfectly clear to him is no longer so well defined. All this renders it difficult to write well about strategy. Only those who have passed through the mental struggles which form part of its execution can be sure that their ideas upon the art will be just. I gladly wrote to you about tactics, because I had had practical experience and could tell you the results of my own observation in war and could judge of that of others. In strategy, however, I have had but little experience, for I have had very few opportunities of being present when determinations were come to, and still fewer of expressing my own views on them.

I therefore referred you to existing works. Clausewitz seems to you out of date.<sup>1</sup> Of course he knew nothing

<sup>1</sup> Clausewitz, who died in 1832, had seen the Prussians defeated in the Jena campaign, and subsequently served in the Russian Army against Napoleon and in the Prussian Army during the wars of 1813, '14, '15. He wrote "On War" and on the 1815 Campaign.—ED.

of railways and telegraphs. But his principles still hold good, and can be easily modified to suit recent discoveries. I then recommended you Blume.<sup>1</sup> You reply that he, like Clausewitz, is too general in his treatment and does not go into sufficient detail.

Then I directed your attention to Bronsart's "Duties of the General Staff."<sup>2</sup> But it did not please you even if studied with Blume. You called it a treatise on the issuing of orders, i.e., the mechanical part of the art, whereas strategy is the conception of the artist from which the mechanic works out the details. Moreover, you say it gives no advice as to how to deal with concrete examples. I therefore recommended the "Strategical-Tactical Exercises" published by the Helwing'sche firm of booksellers in Hanover.<sup>3</sup> These deal with details which the author goes thoroughly into. You replied that they were too few, and embrace too small a part of strategy.

There is nothing left, therefore, for me to do but to write to you about strategy as well as I can. But still I tell you to read Blume and the "Tactical-Strategical Exercises" first, and have Bronsart by your side when you read what I write. For I must base myself on these excellent works, even if I treat the subject from an entirely different point of view.

<sup>1</sup> The work referred to is Blume's "Strategy." Blume served on the Headquarters Staff during the war of 1870-71. He has written besides his "Strategy," a short history of the Franco-German War from the capitulation of Sedan to its termination. He has since been professor at the Staff College and again on the Headquarters Staff. He now commands the XV. Army Corps.—ED.

<sup>2</sup> The late General Bronsart von Schellendorff had a distinguished career on the Prussian Headquarters Staff. He served with it during the war with France, and was subsequently chief Staff officer of the Guard Corps, and later Minister of War. He was employed by Von Moltke to reply to Captain May's pamphlets on the "Prussian Infantry in the War of 1866," and the "Tactical Retrospect." The Duties of the General Staff has been translated from the latest edition by Colonel Maeckel by Lt.-Col. W. H. Hare, R.E.—ED.

<sup>3</sup> This series, now in its fourth edition, was begun by Colonel Gizycki and reached nine parts. The tenth part has just been issued. It is written by Colonel Taubert. This and the previous issues are now published by Luckschwerdt and Co., of Leipzig.—ED.

At the same time do not expect from me an exhaustive treatise or any definite instruction as to how strategy should be conducted, or as to how you are to become a strategist.

For strategy is not a science, but an art which must be practised. The art, it is true, makes use of a number of sciences and arts, and the strategist must know something about each, even if not thoroughly versed in them all. The chief requirement is that he should possess the necessary bent of mind, i.e., he must be born, not made. But in addition he must study much, unless like the strategists of olden times, he has been through many wars, so that much experience may take the place of study.<sup>1</sup> And still neither mental qualification nor study are all-sufficient. The former must be tempered by knowledge of the world, the latter by self-acquired experience. So that if you look to becoming a strategist merely from reading what I write, pray excuse me from the task which you ask me to undertake.

I will first of all tell you my proposed method of instruction, and you shall say if it please you or not. You know my preference for the inductive method. I propose therefore to go through campaign after campaign—I would I could do so *ad infinitum*—and then to marshal the facts we shall thus arrive at, and from them derive rules of conduct of the widest and most certain application. For each situation should be repeated (according to Bronsart, with whom I agree) before we deduce a lesson from it. You must not therefore object to repetition. I am not going to write a concise treatise, but rather a series of conversational letters. I shall deduce from several campaigns the points to lay hold of for future use. But there can only be a general likeness between them, as the com-

<sup>1</sup> On the subject of the value of war experience, the well-known anecdote of Frederick the Great about the mule who had been through the wars of Prince Eugen should be remembered. Exposure to fire will not make a strategist.—ED.

binations of war are so various that nothing is exactly repeated. We shall therefore seek in each case the reasons why certain resolutions were come to, so that in similar cases if even the circumstances are not exactly the same we shall have a just basis for our decisions, remembering, as Blume says, "It is only possible partly to lift the veil which covers the records of war." I shall therefore only deal with campaigns of which the history is known fairly in detail.<sup>1</sup>

This limits us to the wars of the present century, and even then many are of little use for our purpose. Who, for instance, can give the reasons for the movements of the leaders on both sides in the Russo-Turkish War? Why did not Osman Pasha go forward instead of intrenching himself at Plevna? Why did the attack upon the latter last so long? You may say that it is still possible to pass judgment on any given event. But that is not my intention. I do not intend merely to investigate whether here and there a given general made a mistake. That is worthless, and will not enable me to teach you strategy. As a young subaltern I learned under clever teachers to laugh at the stupid mistakes of great leaders, but I cannot say it did me much good. If Frederick and Napoleon made mistakes, it only shows us that strategy is not so easy in practice as it may seem. Even with lesser lights we only learn from their errors that all make mistakes, and that they will always be made. For the best is he who makes fewest: what we want to learn is the reason for the blunders, so as to know what to avoid.

If you agree with my proposals, therefore, we will take a few campaigns of which the details are sufficiently known and go through them up to the first decisive battle; after that the records are as a rule insufficient to show the

<sup>1</sup> "The art is difficult if criticism be easy," is exceedingly true of war. To judge of a general's reasons for what he did we must know what *he* knew at the time and how the circumstances appeared to him. Books on military history written on this principle may be counted on the fingers of one hand without exhausting its numerical capacity.—ED



reasons why the subsequent plan was adopted. For example, if the pursuit after a battle was not sufficiently carried out, it is never possible to say why, as history does not usually record the state of the troops, the disposition of the leader, and many other circumstances which greatly affect the case.

I know of a leader who, as his staff have told me, was so worked up by battle that he never knew when to terminate the fight, and so exhausted was he by the mental exertion, that he could settle nothing till late the next day. This explained to me why the day after his engagements no energetic pursuits were made. Such facts as these are not recorded in history. We therefore will go through the campaigns we choose only up to the first decisive battle and see what lessons of strategy can be learned from them, and when we have cleared up the strategical points, or rather when these have enlightened us as to abstract strategy, we shall be ready to study other wars in a similar fashion. At the same time we shall deal with the various strategical details, such as pursuits and retreats, bases of operations and lines of communication, the issuing of orders, and other staff business, and illustrate these with historical examples.

After this, if all dates and details be forgotten, you will still retain the true principles of strategy. Then you only require the proper mental characteristics and the command of an army in the next war to quickly become a celebrated strategist!

And now you ask what is strategy? Clausewitz says: "Tactics is the employment of troops for the object of the fight, strategy is the adaptation of the fighting to the object of the war." Blume describes "Tactics as that part of the art of war which deals with the use of troops in battle with the proper ordering of their action towards the objects of fighting. Everything not embraced under the head of tactics is strategy."

At another page he says, "The employment of troops

in the fight belongs to tactics and forms its chief object. The decision as to when and for what object battle shall be joined, the assembly of the necessary forces, and the reaping of the proper result, is the business of strategy." Yet both these definitions fail, inasmuch as they do not touch on the effect of national policy on war. To extend the definition of Clausewitz, "policy embraces the employment of war for the good of the state." National policy, strategy and tactics must be kept in perfect unison in war if the results sought for are to be gained.

Blume remarks that tactics are subordinate to strategy, and the latter to national policy. But the reverse may also be true, and he says, quite rightly, that strategical results are limited by tactical possibilities, and that these therefore may modify strategical plans. For this reason it must always be the aim of strategy to unite the greatest possible strength for the tactical blow. It is impossible to be too strong for a decisive battle. In the same way policy may be often subordinate to strategy, although, as a rule, the reverse is the case. The results of the latter may limit or extend the aims of the former, while the national policy may be entirely controlled by military requirements; as in the case when it is required to ensure the help of a neutral state.

Again, both strategy and tactics may have to yield to policy, as in the case in which the storming of a fortress may be desirable for political effect, although otherwise unnecessary—the enemy feeling that the army which has done it is a redoubtable antagonist.

The policy to be pursued may also depend on tactical results. The diplomatic tone after a successful battle is often different to that after one which is lost.<sup>1</sup> Exceptionally, political views may have to be subordinated to tactical considerations, as in 1864. In the war against Denmark

<sup>1</sup> A good example of this occurred in 1805 when as Napoleon remarked the message of the Prussian envoy had a different address *before Austerlitz*.—ED.

political considerations forbade the crossing of the frontier, but when the troops arrived they found it unoccupied, and just in front of them on the Danish side of the frontier a commanding position at Kolding, which it was impossible to allow the enemy to seize. Although from a political point of view it was undesirable to cross the border line, it was at once taken possession of, and diplomacy was exercised to absolve us from the consequences.

Similarly, when Komarov felt obliged to attack the Afghans at Penjdeh for tactical reasons, diplomacy was obliged to justify the action by subsequently putting forward excuses for it. These instances show how desirable it is that the supreme authority in all three, Policy, Strategy, and Tactics, which are so intimately connected, should be centred in the same individual<sup>1</sup>—as it was in Germany in 1866 and 1870. How disastrous the want of complete harmony in these the divisions of war may be, was proved to Prussia in 1806, to Austria in 1859, and to France in 1870.

What the diplomatic body is to policy, the staff is to strategy; the former expresses the wishes of the Government, the latter carries out the will of the general. In each case, a great deal depends on the capacity of the executive body. It follows that an exhaustive treatise on staff duties must embrace strategy, the former including the practical details of which the latter explains the theory.

A good strategist requires a vast amount of knowledge. Not only must he be thoroughly acquainted with the organization of his own and foreign armies, he must be thoroughly up in the proper modes of issuing orders, instructions, and march tables, he must know all about marches, camping, cantonments and bivouacs, lines of communication and supplies, besides what is wanted with regard to weapons, ammunition, and clothing. He must be able to

<sup>1</sup> Difference of views between the Political Officer and the General have not infrequently been detrimental to the proper carrying out of military operations in India. "Silent leges inter arma," is as true as ever it was, and as little acted up to.—ED.

make military sketches and to reconnoitre, be well posted in all matters concerning fortification and fighting, understand the management of railways and telegraphs, and the transport of the wounded. He must be well acquainted with statistics, so as to know the capabilities of a country, and the number of troops it can maintain, and should be sufficiently well up in civil administration to be able to rule a conquered country until the regular civil officials can take over this duty. It is not necessary that he should know all these things in minute detail, he need not be an engine driver nor a clerk of military works ; but he must be able to judge the carrying capacity of a railway, and appraise the power of resistance of a fortress having regard to its position, construction, and garrison.

I do not think that you expect me to lay down an absolute system of strategy. Such systems (which may be likened to quack cure-alls) have indeed been put forward by some writers, as in the case of the doctrine of interior lines of which Frederick the Great made such brilliant use, but which was only in his case due to the position in which he found himself surrounded on all sides by enemies. Similarly, from the results of the 1813 campaign, when the allies surrounded and crushed Napoleon, the method of surrounding the enemy has been much vaunted. But no single system can be derived from the 1870 war. At first, when separating Bazaine and McMahon, the principle of interior lines appeared to be favoured. But in the battles round Metz and at Sedan, that of surrounding the enemy was made use of ; while in the series of operations to all points of the compass which took place during the siege of Paris, we see once more interior lines employed. There are, however, certain strategical axioms which must always be adhered to in war. I lay down the following five:—

1. National policy must be closely allied at every point with strategy.

2. At the onset the destruction of the enemy's army must form the objective. Everything else, the occupation of cities or territories, is only of secondary importance.

3. It is impossible to be too strong for a decisive battle. The whole efforts of strategy must be directed to this end, not diverting more forces for secondary objects than are absolutely necessary.

4. No rigid system must be adhered to, the object should be to choose by sound judgment the shortest path to the desired goal.

5. Changes in the plan of operation lead to incalculable losses of strength and time. Unless therefore the enemy or the elements enforce such alterations they are to be avoided. Sudden changes of intention in the leader have often produced the greatest misfortunes.

Still, however carefully these axioms may be followed, every war will still be a matter of venture. The strategist must therefore renounce all hope of being absolutely certain of the result. He who is not prepared for risks will win no great success, and as in war they must be run, he had better not meddle with it. When to dare and what to dare is the question for consideration. His attention must not be directed to one point only, but all eventualities must be thought over. Nothing, not the most extraordinary action of the enemy, must surprise the strategist. He must be prepared for everything by previous reflection, and be ready at once with the proper reply. All these things require gifts given to but few men, an all-grasping mind and a strong will; only those who possess these attain the main object of strategy, that of dominating the adversary. At no time has this been carried out in a more masterly manner than in 1870-71.

The above-named strategical axioms will hold good so long as the present conceptions of war and peace, policy and strategy hold good. New discoveries such as navigable balloons, will involve no greater changes than

previous discoveries, such as railways, telegraphs, rifled guns, and dynamite.

You laugh, perhaps, at my notion that our ideas of peace and war, policy and strategy may be changed. It is one that has recently come to me. For lately we have seen a campaign without a previous declaration of war and without a treaty of peace concluding it (Alexandria, Egypt).<sup>1</sup> In another part of the globe fighting went on, although both sides declared there was no war and that they were at peace with one another (Tonkin, China and France). Also, we have seen a fight without war (Penjdeh). Certainly such a case occurred more than thirty years ago (Bronzell).<sup>2</sup> But I shall not deal with events of this character in my letters on strategy, although they have raised in my mind the doubt as to whether quite other ideas may not be held some day upon what we now describe as Peace and War, Policy and Strategy.

<sup>1</sup> Prince Kraft was evidently unaware of the explanation that this was not war, but "warlike operations!"—ED.

<sup>2</sup> Bronzell was a fight, or rather collision, which arose out of the insurrectionary movement of '48 in Germany. It took place on the 8th November, 1850. The sole casualty was a white horse on the Prussian side.—ED.

## SECOND LETTER.

THE CAMPAIGN OF 1806, FROM 8TH TO 14TH OCTOBER.

(See *Plan No. 1.*)

### THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE CAMPAIGN.

You have said that you agree with the method proposed by me, so I will commence at once with any one campaign. No! not with any one. I prefer that of 1806. In the first place, disaster is more instructive than success; in the second place, because it, probably of all Napoleon's campaigns, is that which presents the most potent and surprising as well as far-reaching of his successes; and thirdly, because its events, causes, and motives are clearly fixed in history, and are to be found in the work by Höpfner, who used all available sources of information with the greatest conscientiousness and care. Thus it will be easy to follow the movements.

It is also a campaign in which Napoleon I. practically overthrew all previous scientific theories on the art of war by his simple strategy aimed at the destruction of the enemy.<sup>1</sup> In this campaign the great master fought against tried and brave, but second and third class, commanders of the old school. This, too, adds to the instructiveness of the campaign.

<sup>1</sup> Previous to Napoleon the wars of the middle of the eighteenth century, with the exception of Marlborough's Campaign in 1704, had been chiefly wars of manœuvre, methodically conducted like a game of chess. Napoleon swept all these theories away by showing that a nation could not resist when its field armies were destroyed.—ED.

## RELATIVE STRENGTH OF THE ARMIES.

The total strength of the Prussian army was 247,724 men, of the Saxons not quite 50,000, of the allies together not quite 300,000 men.

The forces of Napoleon numbered 560,000 men, to which are to be added 90,000 men—Dutch troops and troops of the Rhenish Federation ; total, 650,000 men.

Of these forces the following took part in the operations up to the catastrophe of October 14th :—On the part of the allies, 128,000 men, supported by the weak reserve corps of the Duke of Württemberg a few days' march in rear ; and on the part of Napoleon 200,000, supported by more than 80,000 men.

Napoleon was thus superior to his opponents not only in the total of his forces, but also in the number of troops available for the first onset, and this in the ratio of 2 : 1.

As to the quality of troops, the Prussian army was imbued with the very best spirit and unsurpassed in discipline ; but its tactics were almost precisely the same as those used in the Seven Years' War.

When fighting occurred it was found that the rigid line formation of the Prussian infantry tactics could not adapt itself to the ground, and that the French, with their system of skirmishers followed by columns, were able to successfully oppose double their number of Prussian infantry.

Little value was then attached by the Prussians to the use of artillery, especially in masses. The French had had some experience in this direction (Austerlitz), though Napoleon seems to have adopted the use of massed artillery as a system only after the success of S  narmont at Friedland.

The Prussian cavalry was still excellent (in fact, Napoleon enjoined caution against it in a general order),



though it had a few antiquated commanders and was superior to the French in numbers. But its leaders had no knowledge of the difficulties with which cavalry may meet when confronted by intact infantry on difficult ground which the latter knew how to utilize with skirmishers and columns.

The command of the Prussian army was nominally held by the Duke of Brunswick; but he had to have all his measures approved by the King, who was present, and to whom many other persons, including subordinate commanders, had accession, and their views listened to. The ensuing frequent consultations with subordinate commanders or chiefs of their staffs caused loss of time and frequently upset the Duke's plan. The command of the Prussian army was thus not in one hand.

Nor could the alliance of Prussia and Saxony be called a firm one. The evening before the catastrophe the Saxon commanders refused to obey orders.

Opposed to an army thus led was Napoleon with his firm, undivided, absolute authority. His fame as a leader had necessarily imbued his army with an unshakable confidence in his ability. His subordinate commanders dreaded his want of consideration for them; rarely did any one dare even to remonstrate against his expressed desire.

The method of issuing orders in the Prussian army was hampered by too much red tape. The organization of the army into divisions, entirely unknown up to that time, and still incomplete at the opening of the campaign, rendered the command extremely difficult. Lengthy general orders became necessary, dealing even with single battalions and squadrons, and requiring much time to write and read. Many things, too, had to be ordered from headquarters which in an army properly organized are matters of course, such as details of outposts, patrols, etc.

In contrast thereto the French army possessed a definite organization with which it had become

familiarized in war. Napoleon had to order only on what roads and how far each corps was to march. The marshals attended to everything else. Only when he attached particular weight to some point did he go into details in his orders, e.g. with regard to security or information, or to call the attention of his subordinate commanders to special dangers and enjoin caution (Lannes at Saalfeld), etc.

It is evident how much easier it was to direct the movements of the French troops.

The method of supply was a still greater block in the way of the operations of the Prussian army. It was the system followed in the Seven Years' War of supply from magazines. It is true that once in a way we come across an order directing troops to supply themselves from this or that village. But this was such a new and unusual thing in the Prussian army, the troops had been so little instructed how to subsist themselves by regular requisitions, that the Prussians not infrequently failed to find anything, and went hungry in villages where subsequently the French found abundance. It is true the Prussian troops were in their own country, which induced hesitation in using threats or force, and therefore more time was spent in making requisitions and smaller results gained. In addition to this, there were no proper relations between the supply departments and commanding generals. The former frequently did not receive timely notice of changes in the movements of troops and therefore despatched supplies in the wrong direction, and the troops went hungry.

The French army had become accustomed to hostilities based on the principle that war must support war. It had been almost continuously engaged in fighting for ten years. It had practice and experience in levying requisitions and contributions. It lived on the district which it occupied. It is true that Napoleon also provided magazines. He had bread baked ; this we find in several of

his orders. It was often necessary, for a district passed through by his army looked as though it had been overrun by a swarm of locusts.

We also read that the Prussian troops were not sufficiently provided with clothing and equipment. The infantry had no overcoats for bivouacking, and the complaints with regard to the defective condition of the muskets are well known. The French army, however, was fully and abundantly supplied with all that was needed.

Finally, we have to deal with the abilities of the commanders. There were probably as many clever and meritorious men among the Prussians as among the French, and perhaps more; but the majority of them were incapacitated for the hardships of a campaign by age and infirmity. This retarded many an operation, because the generals were not always able to execute their orders at once. Thus, on the 13th of October, one of the generals, instead of arriving for consultation before daybreak as ordered, arrived at half-past ten, because he had to wait for his morning sweat, thus delaying the march of the whole army.<sup>1</sup>

The French generals, on the contrary, were young, strong, and inured to war. Most of them were between thirty and forty years of age. Napoleon, the Commander-in-Chief, was thirty-eight years old.

When we consider all these points, we cannot help arriving at the conclusion that the Prussian army of 1806, in spite of the glory gained in former wars, in spite of its excellent spirit and unsurpassed discipline, must be considered inferior to the French; and that, assuming the proportion of numerical strength as 1 : 2, the real proportion must be taken as 1 : 3, if not 1 : 4. This is confirmed by the success of Davout at Auerstädt against the Prussians, in spite of his great numerical inferiority and

<sup>1</sup> The officer in question was probably undergoing some "Kur" (course of treatment) of which this was part.—Ed.

in spite of the unfavourable tactical conditions compelling him to debouch from a narrow defile in the face of the enemy.

It is more than doubtful if Napoleon was fully aware of his great superiority in the points above enumerated, when making his first strategical arrangements for the war of 1806. He feared the Prussian cavalry, as appears from several of his letters. He operated repeatedly with great caution, until on the 14th October he destroyed the Prussian army. But several statements in his letters and addresses to his generals and troops prove that he was sure of final success: "Il paraît qu'ils veulent avoir un leçon.—Nous ferons une campagne comme celle d'Austerlitz.—Nous ferons une belle campagne." These statements were justified by the existing state of things.

#### THE INITIATIVE.

According to Höpfner's historical researches, war was decided upon at Charlottenburg on the arrival of the courier from Paris on the 7th August. He brought a despatch from Lucchesini that Prussia could expect from Napoleon nothing but war, or hard conditions.

The orders for mobilising the army were issued on the 9th August. The disproportion between the armies was known in Prussia. The Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of Brunswick, believed a successful issue of the war impossible. But the national honour was so deeply wounded, that Prussia was compelled to draw the sword; so much was this the case, that it may almost be said that Prussia was driven to war from desperation.

Napoleon had such a low opinion of Prussia's power, that he seems to have firmly believed he could offer her almost any insult and yet that she would not take up arms; for on the 26th August he still wrote to Berthier about the Prussian preparations: "Ridecules armemens, auxquels, il ne faut donner aucune attention," and speaks

of withdrawing the army from Bavaria to France: "Je n'ai pas moins d'impatience que vous et l'armée, de vous revoir tous en France." He was negotiating with England, and had just concluded a peace with Russia.

At the beginning of September, however, he was informed that Russia had failed to ratify the treaty. He at once wrote to Berthier on the 5th of the month to have the roads from Bamberg to Berlin reconnoitred, and to make such preparations as would enable the army to assemble at the former place within eight days of receiving the order.

When he says, in the same letter, that he counted on being able to reach Berlin from Bamberg in ten marches (240 miles), he does not seem to have consulted the map, even if he assumed that he would not be in any way impeded by the Prussian army.

Still, Napoleon does not seem to have believed that there would be war, for on the 10th September he writes to Berthier: "Si je me brouillais avec la Prusse, ce que je ne crois pas, mais si jamais elle en fait la folie. . . ."

Only on the 19th and 20th September did the Guard leave Paris for Mainz, mostly on waggons, and on the 20th Napoleon wrote to Berthier to assemble the army at Bamberg, and the latter issued the necessary orders on the 24th September. The concentration was to be effected by the 2nd October.

Napoleon's ideas may be guessed from these figures. Prussia's armament in itself did not disquiet him. In 1805 he had seen Prussia arm and disarm. Though he had a copy of Lucchesini's despatch, yet he may have thought it possible that Prussia would disregard the ambassador's advice. And, indeed, it seems that General von Knobelsdorff, who had replaced Lucchesini at Paris, succeeded in delaying him with assurances; for as late as September 10th he writes to Berthier: "M. de Knobelsdorff me fait toutes protestations, mais je ne vois pas

moins continuer les armemens de la Prusse ; en vérité je ne sais ce qu'ils veulent."

As soon, however, as Napoleon was convinced of the alliance of Prussia and Russia, and of the former's purpose to go to war, he resolved to destroy her before she could be succoured by the latter.

What information caused this resolve cannot be ascertained from Höpfner's work. The facts, however, indicate that Napoleon must have received it about the 18th or 19th September. It was not his way to idle away time without cause.

From what has been said it may be deduced that Prussia resolved on war on August 9th, Napoleon on September 19th.

Thus Prussia took the political initiative.

Thereby she gained a start of six weeks. She urgently needed the greater part of this time to mobilise her troops, a work of much time in those days, while the greater part of Napoleon's armies stood quite ready in what is now Bavaria, where they had halted on their return from the previous year's campaign. The Guard alone was at Paris, but could march at a moment's notice. However, the start gained by Prussia was still great. Berthier's first orders for the concentration of the army (see Höpfner, p. 195) were issued at a time (September 24th) when Prussia's main forces were united on the Saale and Mulde.

Pursuant to the orders for the concentration,—

Bernadotte was at Bamberg, October 2nd.

Soult between Amberg and Schwandorf, October 4th.

Davout at Bamberg, October 3rd.

Lefebvre (Lannes) at Königshofen, October 3rd (somewhat later at Schweinfurt).

Augereau at Frankfurt, October 2nd, with advanced guard at Giessen.

Murat with the cavalry corps at Erlangen, Windsheim, Mergentheim, Schweinfurt, Aschaffenburg, October 3rd.

Napoleon reached Mainz September 28th, and remained until October 1st, waiting for the Guard, intending to join the army with it.

These measures formed merely a concentration forward, towards the Prusso-Hessian frontier, of his six army corps, which had been widely dispersed over Bavaria as far as the Inn, Württemberg and southern Hesse. Such movements before the beginning of the actual operations are called the strategical deployment. But inasmuch as Napoleon had not yet determined how and where he would strike the enemy, these measures cannot properly be called strategical operations of war.

Napoleon brought his troops as close together as was possible having due regard to their subsistence on the country. From Giessen to Bayreuth may be taken as the front of his position, some 137 miles in a direct line.

The strategic deployment of the Prussian army was in the main completed by September 24th, as stated above. But while Napoleon's only guiding motive was a concentration of his army from where it stood to the shortest road towards the enemy, the object of the deployment of the Prussian troops was to cover an extended frontier in all directions against the enemy. Political considerations, especially the desire to induce Electoral Hesse to active co-operation, were the cause of the wide dispersion of the troops. The Saxons had not yet finished their preparations; but were to stand ready at Zwickau by October 5th.

Thus, in the last third of September, the Prusso-Hessian army was disposed as follows: A considerable part (Rüchel with Blücher) was in Electoral Hesse, extending from Paderborn to Eisenach—Gotha—Erfurt (Höpfner, pp. 133 and 134); the main army was in the vicinity of Naumburg; Hohenlohe's army was between the Mulde and Elbe, having crossed the latter between September 12th and 18th; the Saxons were still mobilis-

ing. The front of the army thus extended some 190 miles.

From what has been stated we see that Prussia took the political initiative, and gained so much time that after finishing her mobilisation she could still have had a start of eight days for the strategical initiative, had she not waited for the mobilisation of Saxony. But then she would have had to begin operations with 20,000 men less.

#### THE PLANS OF OPERATIONS.

The plans of operations of both opponents were based on their strategical deployments.

If we were thinking only of the events of the recent wars of 1866 and 1870-71, or if we had forgotten all we know of older campaigns, we should think that both opponents would now have taken measures to attack the enemy in his most vulnerable spot. For this purpose each side would have had to gain information of the position, strength, and condition of the hostile army, and regulate its own measures accordingly.

But nothing of the sort was done. Both parties were remarkably ignorant of each other's movements, and most surprising is this on the part of Napoleon. For Prussian accounts complain of the large number of French spies, and Napoleon had also directed that officers should be sent from Bamberg towards Berlin and Dresden. One of these officers he instructed himself: "*On dit qu'il y a entre Dresde et Berlin une ville appelée Torgau qu'on dit être fortifiée. Il faut la reconnaître,*" a proof of the ignorance of the French about their enemy's country. On the 5th October Napoleon wrote to Marshal Soult: "*As the enemy's main army is said to be at Erfurt.*" Hence he was unaware that the enemy was divided into three armies, which at that time were at Eisenach, Erfurt, and Jena. Even his masterly dispositions for the battle of Jena, made on the afternoon of the 13th, were still



based on the supposition that he was meeting one concentrated army.

No spies were used on the Prussian side, but at the beginning of September fairly accurate information was accidentally obtained of the position of the enemy's forces in Bavaria, Swabia, Württemberg, Hesse, and they were estimated to number a little more than 200,000 men (Höpner, pp. 126 and 127).<sup>1</sup> Some illusions were still entertained about the probable plans of operations, inasmuch as there was a belief that Napoleon would be compelled to divide his forces, leaving several army corps inactive on the Inn against the Austrians, and using one against Hesse.

Later on, up to the 10th October, detachments of cavalry pushed well to the front furnished fairly accurate information of the enemy. Travellers, too, and inhabitants seem to have carried more information from the French to the Prussian army than the reverse. From the King's letter of the 8th October, to Rüchel, it appears that he was cognizant of the movements by which Napoleon, from October 2nd to 5th, brought his corps in the positions in which he allowed them two days' rest. This letter shows the King surmised Napoleon's intention correctly.

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It is highly interesting to consider the strategical dispositions made by the two opponents seeing they had such meagre information about each other.

Napoleon advanced on Berlin by the straightest line from the centre of his united army. This agreed with the only plan permissible, viz., to crush the power of Prussia as quickly as he could before Russian aid could arrive. Hence he marched in as close formation as possible,

<sup>1</sup> The Prussians had apparently forgotten Frederick the Great's saying that he had twenty spies and one cook while Marshal Soubise (of Rossbach and sauce fame) had twenty cooks and one spy. Fortunately in 1870 they remembered the value of the Frederickian observation.—ED.

convinced that the hostile army must oppose him somewhere. He wished to act with celerity, but did not desire celerity at the expense of the force with which he meant to deal his blows. Therefore, he first united all his troops, then gave them two full days of rest before the impending hardships, and finally moved them on three parallel roads close together.

On the right road: Amberg—Hof, marched the IX. corps (Soult), followed at the distance of half a day's march by the VI. corps (Ney) and by the Bavarians under Wrede. The strength of this column was 60,000 men.

On the middle road: Lichtenfels—Kronach—Lobenstein—Schleiz, Napoleon put the I. corps (Bernadotte), half a day's march behind it the III. corps (Davout), the Guards under Lefebvre a full day's march behind the latter. This middle column was 90,000 strong.

On the left road: Bamberg—Coburg—Gräfenenthal—Saalfeld, marched the V. corps (Lannes), and a half a day's march behind it the VII. corps (Augereau); the latter was followed by the troops of Hesse Darmstadt, under Victor. This column was 46,000 strong.

In front of the army marched Murat's cavalry.

Up to the 8th October all conflicts with the Prussians were to be avoided, and the most peaceful intentions proclaimed everywhere.

On that date the head of the right column arrived at Müncheberg, the middle column at a point half-way between Kronach and Lobenstein, the left column at Coburg.

The heads of the columns thus occupied a front of thirty-eight miles. The depths of the columns was about the same. Three corps at the most were marching on the same road, several of which were to follow the leading ones at only a distance of half a day's march. This is, however, a very difficult operation. For the depth of one column being equal to a day's march, a corps which is to follow

another half a day's march behind cannot march before mid-day, if the leading one marches in the forenoon. Napoleon, therefore, ordered this arrangement only for the second corps in each column. The third corps followed a day's march in rear. This gives for the whole column a depth equal to two and a half days' marches, i.e. 38 miles. Hence the army of 200,000 men in cantonments covered a space of 38 miles square, and moved forward at the rate of  $14\frac{1}{2}$  to 19 miles a day. In his letter of October 5th, to Soult, the Emperor calls the formation he had adopted for the march "a battalion square of 200,000 men." Each man carried bread for four days.

Napoleon's arrangements for his advance, without any definite design as regards the enemy, were made for the facility they gave of meeting the latter at any time and in any direction. They give rise to many instructive strategical reflections.

He wanted to march closed up. The experienced general does not do this by marching his whole force on one road, but by making use of a tract of country the front of which is equal to its depth. This enables him to assemble the whole army as quickly as possible, at the threatened point, wherever that may be.

This mode of march we find again in the advance of the I. and II. German armies through the Palatinate in 1870. A glance at the map of the German official account, which gives the situation on the evening of August 5th, 1870, shows the nine corps with a front of twenty-nine miles, from Bettingen, through Neunkirchen to Einöd, and a depth of about thirty-two miles. Having more roads at their disposal, they were able to march in closer formation than Napoleon in 1806.

Here, too, it was still found advisable not to march more than three corps behind each other on the same road. Three corps following each other are already hard to move forward; for when they all march at the same time, they cover over forty miles of road. The transport

carrying provisions is therefore about this distance from the leading troops, and cannot reach them with certainty when wanted. Hence a column of such depth can only march while the provisions carried by the men last, unless sufficient can be found in the country. But this cannot be known beforehand. For this reason famine would have threatened both the army and the Palatinate from the 5th to the 10th of August, 1870, had we not had railroads by which to bring up food. Along this railroad, therefore, it was possible to march even four corps (IV., Guard, IX., XII.) behind each other for a short time, as the sketch referred to shows.

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Some points of Napoleon's plan of operations are not up to the standard which has been attained since the experience of 1870.

In the first place, we miss the large bodies of cavalry pushed far to the front to gather correct information with regard to the enemy's forces. It is true Napoleon ordered the great mass of Murat's cavalry to march in front of the army; but the distance it went ahead was small. We see how, on coming first into contact with the enemy, against Tauentzien as well as against Prince Louis at Saalfeld, the heads of the cavalry columns were followed by closed-up infantry. There is no such thing as pushing the cavalry forward one or more days' marches in front of the infantry, as the Germans strove to do in 1870.

Considering the genius of Napoleon, who, by this time, had much experience in the leading of armies, and had acquired complete mastery of the art, it would be ridiculous were I simply to blame him. It is more instructive to seek the reasons for his actions. We find, first of all, Napoleon's intentions to avoid all collision with the enemy up to the 8th October clearly laid down in his orders. It appears that he wanted to assemble his

entire force close to the enemy's frontier, while giving peaceful assurances, in order to add the element of surprise to the force of his powerful blows.

The enemy's patrols stretched to Coburg, and Murat reached that place on his first march somewhat in advance of the army. In the further operations, from October 8th to 14th, leading up to the battle of Jena-Auerstädt—if I may anticipate for a moment—you will find that the French cavalry did not risk itself far ahead of the infantry, and was, therefore, unable to gain sufficient information of the enemy. It is only after these battles when the enemy was in the main crushed, that the French cavalry, pursuing far in advance of the infantry, gathered the fruits of victory.

One reason for this clinging of the cavalry to the slower infantry you will find in Napoleon's letters to his lieutenants, especially Soult. Throughout there is apprehension on account of the Prussian cavalry. Napoleon knew its excellence. He knew the weakness of his own, which, though numerous, was inferior to the Prussian in efficiency. He instructed his infantry how to act against the latter. (In his letter of October 5th to Soult he says: "What is to be most feared of the Prussians is their cavalry.") Here then we have an instance where the tactical efficiency of the troops fettered strategy. He did not mean to make full use of his inferior cavalry until that of the Prussians had been broken by his infantry. It seems he wanted to show that Prussia was very weak and little worthy of notice. He would not allow the enemy the smallest success, not even in the first collision of the advanced troops. In this we recognize the general who knows the human heart. The first success in war, however small, is of incalculable value. If the troops are victorious in the first skirmish with the enemy, however small, the news of it raises the *morale* of the whole army; all long for similar glory. When, however, the first collision with the enemy is unsuccessful, then, when the whole army becomes familiar with the idea that it

may have to retire before the enemy, the feeling changes, the desire for fighting diminishes.

That Napoleon took for his first objective not the hostile army but two cities, Dresden and Berlin, may have been one of the consequences of insufficient information about the enemy. I have already mentioned that in his letter to Berthier of September 5th he says that, in case of war, he would concentrate at Bamberg, and that he calculated on marching from there to Berlin in ten days. In his letter of October 5th to Soult he only speaks of an advance on Dresden. He does not say much about the enemy's position. It is astonishing that this great commander, before a decisive battle had been fought, totally disregarded the enemy's forces, and took a geographical point for his object, a thing he had never done previously. Less than a year before, he had begun the war with Austria by concentrating his entire forces against Mack's army. It was he who had deduced from the wars of the Republic the lesson that the hostile army must first be crushed, and that the occupation of districts and cities should not be thought of until afterwards. He had abandoned the theory of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which made the occupation of countries, positions, and cities the first object of strategy, leaving the battle a matter of secondary consideration—a theory from which Frederick the Great alone, up to this time, had frequently deviated.<sup>1</sup> All the more surprising appears to me his strategical objective in 1806, and all the more worth while, therefore, is it to investigate the motives which caused him to abandon his previous method.

His desire to reach Dresden at an early date certainly originated from the fact that he wanted to sever Saxony from her alliance with Prussia, thus weakening the latter's power as much as that of the French would be increased. Later events make this design of the Emperor's plain. Here you perceive how political considerations may modify strategical principles often deemed inviolable.

<sup>1</sup> Marlborough distinctly did so in 1704.—ED.

As to the advance on Berlin, of which he speaks in his letter of September 5th, I am inclined to believe that he calculated on being attacked somewhere or other if he advanced with his "battalion square of 200,000 men" in that direction. With his veteran infantry and artillery he simply considered himself so much superior to the enemy that he felt sure of victory however and wherever he might meet the latter, if he only could march in such close formation that he could unite his forces at any time for the decisive battle.

Had he been accurately informed of the position of the enemy's main forces, he would certainly have taken them for his object. It is true all accounts and memoirs of that time tell of the numerous spies which Napoleon had moving about in the Prussian army; but information from such spies usually takes two or three days to arrive, and can never replace reconnaissance by cavalry, which furnishes reports on the same day. But, as I have already stated, Napoleon did not deem his cavalry capable of far-reaching strategical reconnaissance in the face of Prussian cavalry.

It is not to be supposed that Napoleon entertained the idea of reaching Berlin without giving battle. In his letter to Soult of 8 a.m., October 10th, he says explicitly: "I desire a battle above everything . . . it is not impossible that the enemy will attack me. . . . After that battle I shall be at Berlin or Dresden before him."

It can hardly be presumed that Napoleon indulged in the illusion of terminating the war by the occupation of Berlin. But a year before he had entered Vienna without compelling the Austrians thereby to sue for peace. After overcoming the enemy's army, however, the occupation of his capital gave him the power of systematically draining the hostile country.

Still, if Napoleon thought of compelling Prussia to sue for peace by entering Berlin, he made a miscalculation, as subsequent events prove.

I now turn to the Prussian plan of operations. You will perhaps say that it is easy to find fault with. It has been adversely criticized by public opinion and by many writers, as well as by subsequent events. When a battle has been lost, when war has prostrated a country, it is easy to show afterwards that errors have been made. But that does not teach us anything. The point to investigate is what led to them? It is only thus we learn how to avoid them in the future. Who would presume to think himself wiser than the Prussian leaders of 1806? They were eminent men, who had seen much fighting. They are sufficiently described in Von der Goltz's lecture on "Rossbach and Jena" (published by Mittler, 1882). As you know him, you will excuse me from repeating what he says. You will also probably agree with me that at first sight it appears surprising how such clever men could make such grave strategical errors. Let us see how they came to do so.

I have shown before that the Prusso-Saxon forces stood to those of Napoleon in the proportion 1 : 2, and that the disproportion was largely increased by the superiority of the French tactics and the war experience of their army. The Prussian leaders did not believe in the superiority of the French tactics. The linear tactics of the Great King were to them the fundamental basis of action. They saw no reason for change; for as late as the wars of the French Republic these tactics had led to glorious successes. The skirmishing tactics of the French infantry appeared to them the offspring of revolutionary disorder which would fail before the stern discipline of the Prussian line. If, therefore, we wish to place ourselves in the position of the Prussian leaders, it is only necessary to consider the numerical superiority of the French. This was known to the former, as appears from Höpfner's work; hence I am inclined to look upon it as chiefly a political error to have gone to war without prospect of success. Napoleon had no intention to force Prussia into war. This is evident from his corre-



spondence, according to which he did not believe, up to September 5th, that Prussia entertained hostile intentions. As a fact, however, he drove Prussia into war by the want of consideration shown her, although this was not his intention. After the Prussian policy of 1805, he attributed to Prussia so little power, and such want of resolution to her Government, that he did not deem it necessary to show much regard for her.

But by this want of consideration he wounded the national honour of Prussia daily more deeply and drove her into war. We might perhaps say that in politics we must consider and calculate calmly, and not be influenced by sentiment and inclination, by considerations of honour and sympathy. But what made us draw the sword in 1870? Nothing but the wounding of our national honour! I might say Prussia should have gone to war in 1806, having previously made herself as strong as Napoleon was. To the objection that Prussia was too small and poor for that, you might reply that, in 1813, though still smaller and absolutely impoverished, she developed immense power, far greater than in 1806. The reason why she could not do more in 1806 lay in her constitution. After the manner of the eighteenth century, Prussia in 1806 waged a personal war of the monarch only. The army was his property, the money available for war was in a certain sense the king's money. On the other hand France made use of the resources of the entire nation. Brought to the top by a revolution which made the will of the people supreme, Napoleon found everywhere, in spite of the despotism in which he held France, ready willingness and obedience and an inexhaustible supply of men and money. For by observing the proper forms, he knew how to make the people believe that it approved the measures he took acting as emperor. Here we see strategy dependent not only on the method of conducting war, but also on the interior political condition of the country.

In 1870 the situation was reversed. Then all Germany entered into the conflict. For by the system of universal military service the whole nation participated in the war. The constitution of the French army of 1870 closely resembled that of the standing armies of the previous century. Hence Germany was enabled in 1870 to deliver the first decisive blows with superior numbers.

In spite of these considerations I do not regard it as wrong to have begun the conflict in 1806, so far as numbers were concerned.

Had the Prussians succeeded in gaining some important, even though partial, results at the beginning, they might have hoped for rapid accession to their strength. The Elector of Hesse throwing off his wavering policy, would have decided in favour of Prussia; Austria was not unwilling to renew the war had there been some prospect of success, and many a Prince of Germany only waited for an opportunity to shake off the heavy French yoke. Thus, after the first success, Prussia might have hoped to increase her forces until she was on an equal footing with her enemy in this respect. The arrival of the Russians must have decided the victory.

But it was necessary to win a first success, and how could that be accomplished? By surprise only, and the concentration of all the forces at the decisive point. And everything indicates that this was the king's intention. For this reason he kept putting off the French emperor. Although he had decided on war on the 9th August, he succeeded in keeping Napoleon in doubt about it until the middle of September, and thus gained time for arming and assembling his troops.

The advantage, gained by the political initiative of Prussia, could only be fully utilized by rapidly advancing with united forces on Frankfort, by Eisenach, crushing the French corps located there and threatening the lines of communication and retreat of the remaining corps which were scattered along the Inn and over Bavaria. This line of

action gave prospect of carrying along with it the Elector of Hesse and adding his troops to the Prussian forces. Or the Prussians might have advanced through Hof on the nearest French corps and overpowered them. This enterprise involved less danger, because the Prussian line of retreat was better protected than in the former; for it lay straight to the rear. Moreover, it covered Saxony, which was still wavering, and was nearer to Austria, whose assistance was counted upon.

What was done instead on the part of Prussia? Her leaders hesitated a long time which of the two ways to adopt, and instead of concentrating their forces they were scattered in accordance with the theory of covering countries and producing effect by occupying positions from the Baltic through Paderborn and Eisenach, along the Thuringian Forest as far as Hof and Saxony!

This strategy, making the possession of countries and occupation of positions its main object even without a collision with the enemy, was the result of the historical development of former wars. In the time of the Condottieri of the fifteenth century opposing armies did not fight at all, but, so to speak, pushed each other out of positions. There were then decisive battles of which history reports the fact that two men were crushed to death in the throng; there were no dead or wounded. For the Condottieri avoided each other, here to-day, there to-morrow. Those who were opponents to-day, would perhaps fight side by side to-morrow. Both sides were interested in preserving the lives of soldiers, who were a source of income and had cost money. Though Charles VIII. put an end to this state of affairs in Italy by his campaign at the end of the fifteenth century, it still was to the advantage of monarchs who paid their standing armies out of their own pockets, to avoid battles and reach the object of the war by manœuvring whenever possible. Only thus it can be explained why long wars, like that of the Spanish succession at the beginning of the eighteenth

century, show such a relatively small number of battles. That war lasted more years than that of 1870-71 did months. In it twice as many European powers took part, and yet far fewer battles were fought than in 1870-71.

It is true, Frederick the Great did away with this system of occupying positions and covering districts. He advanced upon the hostile forces, beat them, and thus secured the possession of the land. But when his resources of men and money had been exhausted by the numerical superiority of his opponents, he was often compelled in the second half of the Seven Years' War to avoid battles and have again resource to the "strategy of positions." He did not do this, however, because he thought it more effective, but because it enabled him to deceive the enemy who, in turn, avoided decisive blows. Thus alone was the Great King enabled to escape destruction in the conflict with tenfold superior enemies.

He seemed thus, to outward appearance, to approve this kind of strategy. The Prussian leaders, who became prominent at the end of the eighteenth century, had been trained in it; with it they had won victories, gained glory, and defended their country against the irregular hordes of the Republic. No wonder that, in 1806, they made their plans in accordance with the same rules.

Thus all plans of operation proposed by the Prussian leaders in 1806 are animated with the same ideas of strategy. In most of them some geographical point is the object of the operations, not the hostile army.

The most characteristic is that of Colonel von Massenbach. He proposed to advance with the Silesian army through Saxony and, *via* Hof, to the Danube, and then sweeping everything before him, to return victorious to Saxony through Bohemia (Höpfner, p. 117)! To-day, judged according to modern principles of strategy, this plan would be called the utterance of a madman, then its author was considered one of the most scientific among the superior officers.

Another plan of operations (Höpfner, pp. 141, etc.), it is true, begins with the enemy and the information gathered of him. But then it requires the advance of an army to Fulda, *vid* Gotha, and of another to Hof. An intermediate corps was to advance from Erfurt towards the Thuringian Forest, and another army was to be placed in reserve at Naumburg. Thus the Prussian forces were to be divided into four parts and scattered over a front of eighty-five to ninety miles. The expression, that the two armies at Fulda and Hof would represent two formidable bastions, the curtain being formed by the Thuringian Forest and the Rhön Mountains, proves how fond they were of indulging in scientific phrases, in which even those who used them could see nothing of practical application. Such phrases, however, made a deep depression on the hearers, simply because they, too, did not understand them, and were afraid of being thought ignorant if they admitted it. This very plan was considered by writers of that time as the only one that promised success.

Considering the views then held about strategy, it is surprising, after all, that a plan of operations was adopted which cannot be called injudicious in its fundamental ideas and objects (Höpfner, pp. 159, etc.). Assuming the enemy to be scattered over Bavaria and as far as Frankfurt, the united army was to advance from Erfurt beyond the Thuringian Forest, interposing between the hostile forces and beating them in detail.

But this plan was never carried out. As the result of various considerations and objections, it came about that too great forces were detached for subordinate purposes (Rüchel, for instance), and thus diverted from the main object. Finally, other propositions were entertained which resulted in the army being widely scattered. Thus, for example, the Saxo-Silesian army was permitted to march in the direction of Chemnitz (which direction was later on again changed).

With but little alteration from October 5th to 8th the army stood as follows :—

Rüchel near Eisenach, outposts towards Hesse and Meiningen.

The main army around Erfurt, outposts as far as Hildburghausen.

Hohenlohe at Jena and Roda, advanced guard towards Saalfeld.

Tauntzien at Hof, Gefell and Schleiz.

Thus, at a time when the enemy's forces were concentrated in one mass advancing on a front of thirty-eight miles, the Prussian army was extended over a front of more than eighty-five. The enemy was rather in position to interpose between parts of the Prussian army than the latter was to act thus against the French.

The execution of the plan least of all corresponded with its fundamental idea, for it lost time instead of gaining it. The execution was so much delayed that the advanced guard was unable to reach Meiningen and its vicinity before October 11th. It could no longer be called a strategical surprise. This was due to the lack of harmony between national policy and strategy.

What caused this loss of time after such a good start had been gained by the political initiative? The answer to this question, as given by history, contains one of the most important precepts in strategy.

Among the prominent men in Prussia, the King was one of the few who were free from the prevailing scientific theories of war. Wherever he expresses his own ideas, they are based on sound reason. We recognize this from his utterances so far as they have come down to us, from his letters (among others those to Rüchel). He meant to attack the enemy with united forces, to divide and beat him. He also recognized in time, when and why it was too late for a strategical surprise; but he was still young in comparison with the prominent generals, some of whom were in a certain way his teachers. It seems that he en-

tertained a high opinion of their military knowledge, and of their tried experience, and could not bring himself to assume a commanding tone towards them. Therefore, in order to do the best, he frequently called the leaders together and listened to the propositions of them all. These consultations began in Berlin and often lasted entire days; while they were going on nothing was done, because no decision was come to.

Worse than this loss of time was the fact that in seeking the best, plans were frequently changed according to the reasons which this or that general put forward. This caused counter orders, aimless marches, and thus a double loss of time.

Such meetings of commanders have other pernicious consequences. The authority of the Commander-in-chief is impaired by permitting subordinates to advance their own ideas, especially when they prevail. Further, a subordinate leader may easily come to think that his idea will be followed after all. Thus the final determination does not receive his full support, and he often delays his arrangement up to a later moment than is desirable, with the idea that he may still be able to operate according to his own plan. All this causes grave uncertainty and half-measures. We shall see that the catastrophe of Saalfeld was the result of this want of decision.

*The best is the enemy of the good*, is an old proverb the truth of which receives nowhere more confirmation than in strategy. He who calls a council of war is half defeated. It is better to adopt an inferior plan and carry it out with consistency than to consult subordinates, thereby losing time and raising doubts.

Wherever in history great warlike successes are recorded, the chiefs never called their subordinates together for consultation. They may sometimes have listened to somebody's opinion, but they made their own decisions and framed their plans.

Frederic the Great assembled his generals only to give

them orders. Napoleon never held a council of war ; but sent very precise categorical instructions and orders. Instead of calling his subordinate leaders together for consultation or oral instruction, he even preferred to write lengthy letters explaining his projects whenever it was necessary that they should know them. The conduct of war of 1870-71 on the part of the Germans has justly excited the admiration of the world. Were the subordinates ever called together for a council of war ? Never ! The Headquarters Staff sent instructions<sup>1</sup> to the armies in accordance with His Majesty's pleasure. The Army Commanders sent orders, or instructions to the army corps. Corps Commanders did not see their superiors sometimes for weeks, nor the latter the King. Unless it was specially necessary, they never knew the motives actuating the higher commanders, and never were in the position to spend their time in proposing plans for the conduct of the war, but could devote themselves to their immediate duties within the limits of their own commands.

For in war a leader of troops is fully occupied with his own duties. If called into consultation as to the whole operations, he is removed from the troops under his command, and the instructions he ought to give them are delayed. It is a very dangerous proceeding to take a commander far away from his troops, of which the period, from the 8th to the 14th October, furnishes many pernicious examples.

This much we learn from the measures taken by the Prussians in 1806, that it is much more important to adopt some clear, fixed plan than to spend time trying to choose the very best and so to be constantly changing.

Against the Prussian plan, formed in accord with so-called scientific requirements after much consideration,

<sup>1</sup> The word in the original, *Direktiven*, means general instructions as to what is wanted, the detail execution of which is left to the subordinate commanders —ED.



Napoleon opposed a simple, straight advance. He moved his army in a straight line toward the capital, formed in a "battalion square of 200,000 men," covering a front and depth of thirty-eight miles. In the beginning his strategy was very simple, even clumsy; but, on the other hand, he lost no time, least of all in councils of war.

After giving his army two days' rest, he pushed forward this powerful battering-ram, firmly convinced that he would be able to rend with it the most intricate network which the enemy's strategy might weave for him. Clausewitz has extracted from his operations the great truth expressed in the following words: "In war everything is simple, but the simple is difficult."

I have before compared the French movements at the opening of the campaign of 1806 with the advance of the I. and II. Armies through the Palatinate in 1870. The two are analogous in that both leaders made no plans in advance further than the strategical deployment, or, to be more accurate, the concentration of the army. What followed afterwards depended upon circumstances.

There have been some who claim that, at the very opening of the operations of 1870, Moltke planned the capitulation of Sedan. That is utterly impossible, and just as impossible is it that at the outbreak of the war of 1805 Napoleon should have thought of Austerlitz, or in 1806 of Prenzlau. The first aim of strategy is the deployment of the army. As soon as this is complete, we notice a marked difference between the measures of the French in 1806 and of the Germans in 1870. Napoleon used to say, "On s'engage partout et l'on voit."<sup>1</sup> This principle, which is applicable to most tactical situations, he seems to have applied also to strategy in 1806, for he simply advanced and had no accurate information of the enemy until after the first engagements.

The German leaders of 1870 did exactly the reverse.

<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact Napoleon said this of battle-fighting, not of strategy.—ED.

By sending the cavalry well in advance, they cleared up the strategical situation and then engaged the enemy. Thus they acted more systematically and prudently. Does this imply censure on Napoleon ? I think not. If an attentive pupil builds up on the foundation laid for him by his instructor, he is bound to surpass him in some respects, both being equally gifted.

When in 1806 the Prussian leaders saw that the time for a strategical surprise had passed, a consultation of the leaders and their general staff officers, of several days' duration, was held at Erfurt, at which it was decided on the 7th October not to take the offensive by crossing the Thuringian Forest, but to await behind it (to the north) in the vicinity of Erfurt with united forces the movements of the enemy, and to pounce upon him wherever he might come from, like a tiger waiting for his prey.

Strategically this was not a bad plan. Whether the enemy threatened to turn the right or left flank, it was possible in either case to fall on his flank with united forces ; and a direct advance through the defiles of the Thuringian Forest against the Prussian front offered the fewest chances to the enemy. The King's letter to Rüchel, October 7th, expresses this sound view of the case.

We shall see how this idea failed to be carried out, and was modified by pursuing secondary objects and listening to counsels at variance with it, when we deal with the strategical operations from October 8th to 13th.

### THIRD LETTER.

#### FRENCH MEASURES FROM THE 8TH TO THE 13TH OF OCTOBER.

ON the 8th October the two armies came into collision for the first time. The cavalry in advance of the French left column drove a Prussian post of observation from Coburg, and the advanced troops of Murat and Tauentzien met at Saalfeld and Gefell.

With the first conflict with the enemy, strategy enters upon another phase. On one hand it gives rise to tactical events, on the other hand these events react upon strategy. The field of mere speculation must be abandoned for that of reality. At this point even the strategy of the last century had to cease calculating about geographical points and the occupation of districts, etc. ; it was compelled by the enemy to take his acts into consideration.

On the 9th October Napoleon's strategical arrangements were thus influenced by contact with the enemy. It is true he let the mass of his troops continue the advance in the same direction, the head of the right column advancing as far as Hof (14 miles), the middle column to beyond Schleiz (19 miles), and the left column as far as Gräfenenthal.

But the fact that Tauentzien did not show much force against the middle column, and had to give way at Schleiz, after an obstinate resistance, as soon as the masses of Murat and Bernadotte made themselves felt, and the previous information (previously brought in by spies) that

the Prussian army was in the vicinity of Erfurt, made Napoleon apprehensive for his left column. The Emperor himself arrived on this day at Ebersdorf. It was probably then that he learned the character of the Saale, which runs in a deep valley, where the points of crossing form regular defiles. I cannot help thinking that the destruction of Mortier's corps on the Dürrenstein may still have been fresh in his mind. Less than a year ago, this corps, detached from the left wing and separated from the army by the Danube, had fallen into a trap. If all French corps continued in the same direction the next day, the left wing would become separated from the army by the Saale, and the fate of Mortier in 1805 might have fallen on it if attacked by the whole Prussian army. Hence Napoleon enjoined the greatest caution on Marshal Lannes, who marched at the head of the left column, during his advance from Gräfenenthal to Saalfeld on the 10th October.

Augereau was to follow half a day's march in rear of Lannes, and it might be presumed that these two together, 46,000 strong, would be able to oppose a greatly superior force for at least one day. But Napoleon knew from experience that the rear corps, even if it does camp only half a day's march from the leading corps, is separated from it on the advance by a whole day's march, because it cannot begin to move until half a day after the former. For, as already stated, the leading corps covers the road for the distance of a day's march, hence the head of the second corps is that distance from the front, and it cannot, in case of danger, support the leading corps with its full force on the same day.

In fact, on the 10th October Augereau did not get farther than Gräfenenthal, which Lannes left that date, and was thus a whole day's march behind him. Considering the implicit obedience required and enforced by Napoleon from his subordinate leaders, it must evidently have been impossible for Augereau to advance further on that day.

History gives us no reason for Augereau's deviation from the plan of operations; but whoever has seen troops marching in a mountainous country can imagine how Lannes' column, during its march over this spur of the Thuringian Forest, may have become so extended and delayed as to prevent Augereau from going any farther.

From these facts it may be deduced that two corps following each other on the same road cannot be considered a concentrated force in the case of an engagement, because one cannot support the other with certainty on the same day, especially when the field of battle is in front of the leading corps. Corps marching abreast can support each other more quickly, as I have already stated. It had no bad consequences, however, for Lannes, because he did not meet superior forces on the 10th. But it is interesting and instructive to make such investigations even in cases where the result teaches no decisive lesson. For many things are done in war which might produce disastrous consequences, but which remain unnoticed because nothing untoward happens. In this case, for example, the army of Prince Hohenlohe, which on the 8th was at Jena and Roda, might have advanced to Rudolstadt on the 9th, and brought on Marshal Lannes the next day the same fate which overtook Mortier at the Dürrenstein. That it had remained at Jena, Napoleon did not and could not know. Hence his injunctions of precaution were perfectly justified.

Napoleon took no measures to support Lannes, on the 10th October, from the other columns. He thought it sufficient to enjoin caution so that the latter might fall back on Augereau should he meet superior forces.

But he did take measures to draw more troops to the left column in the next few days if necessary, by advancing the corps of Marshal Ney, which was following Soult's corps in the right column, by a forced march of nearly 28 miles from Münchberg to Gefell through Hof, the head of the corps reaching Tanna. This brought it

closer to the middle column. The remaining corps adhered to the previously arranged march table.

Soult, on the extreme right wing, reached Plauen after a march of 19 miles. Behind him was left a gap, because Ney was drawn towards the left and Wrede could not get farther than Baireuth. Bernadotte, at the head of the middle column, reached the line Auma-Triptis-Neustadt; 15 miles in front of him was Murat's cavalry, 15 miles behind him was Davout reaching beyond Schleiz; Lannes marched 15 miles to Saalfeld, where he dispersed the enemy's advanced guard and pushed his advanced troops in pursuit to near Rudolstadt. I have already stated that Augereau, following him, only reached Gräfenenthal.

From the 10th October Napoleon changed his plan of operations entirely. Until then it consisted in a straight advance, from the point of concentration of the army by the nearest roads to Berlin and Dresden. The engagement at Saalfeld, the retreat of Taubentzen's troops, the fact that the French right column met with hardly any opposition, showed him the possibility of reaching the enemy's left flank and menacing his retreat on these towns.

Napoleon did not publish any definite plan of operations. What he put forth in his bulletins and other later publications as to the events is without historical value, for he altered truth to suit his views whenever it pleased him. But in his letters containing instructions to his more distant lieutenants and in his general instructions he made his thoughts known without reserve as they occurred to him. Hence the two letters of October 10th to Soult are of the greatest historical interest. In both letters he gives full and accurate expression to his thoughts as they crossed his mind. The want of order in the arrangement of what he has to say, proves that he wrote in great haste and leads to the presumption that they may have been among those of which he is said always to

have dictated four at the same time. But it is this very haste and lack of order that puts the stamp of truth on them.

It seems he thought it possible that the enemy was advancing against him. The presence of Prince Louis at Saalfeld, and the advance of the Duke of Weimar through the Thuringian Forest on Schmalkalden and Meiningen (October 9th), made him suppose the hostile army was taking the offensive. For such an emergency he did not think his army sufficiently concentrated, and he resolved, therefore, to assemble it in a defensive position at Schleiz. He "rejoiced" at the thought of being attacked there.

The way in which he clung to the direction he first took was characteristic of his natural boldness. He was not in the least disquieted by the advance of the Duke of Weimar, although if carried out with any kind of energy, it must have seriously threatened his line of retreat. He knew too well that the enemy must strike his main body to gain any decisive result. The more troops the Prussians pushed towards the south, the more they detached in various directions, the smaller would be their available force for the decisive battle. Therefore it was that he rejoiced at the thought that the enemy might attack him. Should the enemy allow himself to be attacked, most surely would he avail himself of the opportunity. After the battle he would anticipate his opponent at Dresden and Berlin. So much he says in his letter.

You thus see that it is the enemy's army which he wants to beat, and that geographical points are only a secondary consideration. He speaks in this letter of reaching Dresden without fighting only in case the enemy should elude him by way of Magdeburg. The former place had a great attraction for him, because he wanted to break off the alliance of the Saxons with the Prussians.

It also appears from this letter that on the 10th October

Napoleon conceived the plan, if he could take the offensive, of striking the enemy in a direction which would endanger his line of retreat to Berlin, although this involved forming to his flank with his back towards the frontier of neutral Austria. Since the Prussians had behind them as a base of operations a large extent of country, whereas Napoleon had a neutral state which was certainly not friendly, his situation in the case of an unsuccessful battle would have been much more dangerous than that of his opponents. Strategical operations of this character are not permissible unless tactical success is assured beyond a doubt, and when it is unnecessary to contemplate the possibility of defeat.

Napoleon was fully aware that during the movement his situation would be for some days critical. Because the advance of the Duke of Weimar (whose strength he did not know) in the direction of Schweinfurt threatened his line of communication and might interfere with the regular supply of subsistence. He, therefore, recommended Marshal Soult in his letter to provide bread for several days before joining him. For if Napoleon were to execute the left wheel of his army which he contemplated, supplies could hardly be expected to reach the right wing, as they would have to pass through the other corps.

While writing this letter, Napoleon received Soult's report of the evening of October 9th from Plauen, saying that he had only found about 1000 men in his front, who had gone to Gera, and that towards Dresden there was no enemy.

Then it was that Napoleon concentrated all his forces for a general action, as a tiger gathers himself for his spring. He thought the enemy would oppose him at Gera ; but he doubted if the enemy would be assembled there in force. Therefore he resolved to crush quickly the enemy's left wing at Gera with superior numbers, and then to change his front. For this purpose he assembled



his army on the central column for the double purpose of extricating the left column from its dangerous position beyond the Saale and to assemble the whole army for a general action. This is the object of his orders for the 11th October, which must have left his headquarters during the 10th, for in his second letter to Soult (6 p.m., October 10th) Napoleon refers to them.

By these orders he brought the left column from Saalfeld towards Neustadt and to the right bank of the Saale.

Bernadotte, with Murat's cavalry in his front, marched on Gera as the advanced guard of the whole army. Davout followed to Mittel Pöllnitz, Napoleon marched with the guards to Auma, Ney went to Schleiz, and Soult to Langen Wetzendorf. Thus the right column, after joining the central column by a circuitous route, now formed the reserve of the entire army in case of a battle in front. Napoleon meant to unite his whole army on a width of fifteen miles, with a depth of twenty-eight miles. This enabled him to take the offensive better towards his left than towards his front. He believed, and rightly, that he would not meet the entire hostile army in his front at Gera, but rather towards his left flank. At the same time he manœuvred on the 11th with great caution. For had the enemy advanced with his entire army from Gera, which he did not think quite impossible, he would have drawn back his advanced guard and united his whole army in one day on the line Triptis-Pöllnitz-Weida.

In stating that on the 11th the Emperor united his army on a front of fifteen miles, I did not consider the fact that Augereau remained at Saalfeld on the 11th. This, however, does not seem to have been Napoleon's intention, for he writes to Soult: "I hope the marshals Lannes and Augereau are at Saalfeld." Hence he did not know that on the 10th the latter had only reached Grafenthal, and on the 11th had been unable to get

farther than Saalfeld. He believed that Augereau had been able to keep his distance of half a day's march, and would hurry to Lannes' assistance as soon as the latter became engaged. For Napoleon had received no report of the engagement at Saalfeld when he wrote to Soult at 6 p.m., he had only heard the cannonade.

But Augereau had not been able to carry out the Emperor's orders, or to fulfil his expectations.

Napoleon held to the principle, and he often expressed it, of imposing on his troops the impossible in order to get out of them what was possible. This principle is a dangerous one, for if we give such orders as to render it necessary to forbear criticism when they have not been completely carried out, it is impossible to know exactly what to expect.

In following the strategical dispositions made by the Royal Headquarters of our army in 1870-71, and comparing them with what was carried out, it is impossible to find a single army corps that was unable to accomplish the march ordered. Our staff was better trained and did not make wrong calculations. Do not think for one moment that I am presuming to criticize a genius in the art of strategy like Napoleon. I only mean again to refer to the fact, as I have done once before, that our leaders studying Napoleon's ways of leading an army, have developed and improved them. Napoleon in a manner was the creator of modern strategy, the chief rule of which is that one can never be too strong for the decisive battle. But having created it, he could not build up on the study of the past. His system had to be deduced from his own experience. Hence it was susceptible of improvement.

I would like to call your attention to another interesting point in these two letters to Soult, and that is Napoleon's method of leading an army as illustrated in them. He ordered how and when the corps were to march the next day. His chief of the staff, Berthier, made

out the orders according to these instructions. But, by the side of these orders, there appear the private letters of the Emperor to his marshals, and especially to those who, being far distant and isolated, were most apt to find themselves compelled to act on their own responsibility and contrary to his orders. These letters therefore contain general instructions, informing the marshals as accurately as possible of the general situation and the Emperor's plans, to enable them to act in harmony with each other in case of emergency. In them he also occasionally gives express permission to act independently and digress from his orders; for instance, in his letter of the forenoon on the 10th he says: "If you find something to undertake against the enemy within a day's march from you, you are authorized to do so."

This method of specially directing an army in addition to giving the usual orders we find again in the German method of conducting the war of 1870-71, only improved and more systematically organized. Officers of the general staff, thoroughly familiar with the general situation, were in critical moments sent from the Royal Headquarters to the commanders of armies and army corps. But not much time was lost in writing. The letters they carried were short. Their bearers were able to give oral information about everything, and to inform those to whom they were sent of the plans of the Commander-in-chief. Thus one was sent to Speyer to the Crown Prince before the battle of Weissenburg, one to the battle of Colomby-Neuilly, August 14th, another later on to the battle of Beaumont, after MacMahon's march to the north to turn our right flank had become known. I mention only these few cases, because I happen to know them of my own knowledge. The official history does not give all these details.

In later years Napoleon sometimes sent for commanding generals, and conversed with them for hours, communicating his plans. Marmont, in his memoirs, complains

much of this, because it deprived him of the time needed to make proper arrangements for his corps, and these complaints support what I have told you before, that it is not expedient to call subordinate commanders away from the vicinity of their troops. But Napoleon did not do this systematically nor often. It seems, according to Marmont's account, that he only did it to allay his own uneasiness in critical situations by sending for one or another of his oldest intimates to relieve his mind. Nor did he have such a well-trained staff as the German army had in 1870, which can furnish trustworthy men to send to the subordinate commanders.

The events of the 11th October gave Napoleon further information about the enemy. Lannes' report, too, of the engagement at Saalfeld must have reached him during the night of the 10th-11th October.

The situation so far as he knew it was as follows: The advanced guard of Prince Louis had been scattered at Saalfeld, and, as far back as Rudolstadt, no fresh forces had come to its relief. The advanced guard of the French army (Murat and Bernadotte) had reached Gera without opposition. The cavalry had captured some baggage (probably belonging to Tauntzien's corps) retreating from Gera, by Crossen, to Camburg. Reconnaissances in the directions of Zeitz, Jena, and Altenburg had not discovered any enemy.

Thus all the French corps reached their destinations on the 11th October, except Augereau, who was unable to get further than Saalfeld.

Deceived by the retrograde movements of the Prussian detachments on the right bank of the Saale, Napoleon believed that the hostile army was about to retire beyond the Saale and the Ilm. Hence the movements he ordered for the 12th October aimed at overtaking the enemy and at the same time intercepting his line of retreat to Berlin. This necessitated a forward movement of the whole army, which had to wheel to its left.

Augereau, who was to march on the left bank of the Saale from Saalfeld on Cahla, formed the pivot of this movement.

Lannes was to march on Jena by Neustadt.

Davout, reinforced by a division of dragoons, was to push forward by a forced march as far as Naumburg, Soult and the Guards to reach Gera; Ney, Mittel-Pölnitz. The Emperor, it seems, still thought it impossible that the enemy wished to entirely denude the vicinity of Leipzig and Dresden of troops, for he sent Bernadotte and Murat to Zeitz with orders to reconnoitre towards Leipzig.

The change of front accomplished, the army stood facing west on the evening of the 12th October.

In the first line, Augereau at Cahla, Lannes between Neustadt and Jena, Davout at Naumburg; behind them, Ney at Pölnitz, the Guards and Soult at Gera, Bernadotte and Murat at Zeitz. The army was thus divided into two parts; Davout, Bernadotte, and Murat appearing as detached towards the north to threaten the enemy's flank and line of retreat.

There is much in these movements that must strike you, and of which we are together going to seek the reasons, although with the data available much can only be guessed, not definitely ascertained.

In the first place you will probably be as much surprised as I am that Napoleon, who on the 10th October was apprehensive about Marshal Lannes, marching on the left bank of the Saale, although he would then have been able to fall back on Augereau, now two days later allows the latter to advance, totally isolated, by the left bank of the river from Saalfeld through Rudolstadt, in a direction where no aid could reach him on the 12th of October. The success at Saalfeld was not of such importance as to remove all danger; for the troops of Prince Louis had hardly numbered 10,000 men. The closer the army approached the enemy, the more imminent must any

such danger have appeared. It is only possible, therefore, to suppose that Napoleon was firmly convinced the enemy was in full retreat. Facts proved that in this he was mistaken. The Prussian main army stood in the night of the 10th-11th October near Blankenhayn, and could have marched to Rudolstadt as well as to Weimar without the movement coming to Napoleon's knowledge. Then, on the 12th October, it might have crushed Augereau at Rudolstadt, and pushed him into the Saale. This is another proof that the Emperor did not exact from his horsemen the same strategical reconnaissance as we do now, probably because he was afraid of the superiority of the Prussian cavalry; otherwise he would have given Augereau sufficient of this arm, which, if properly handled, would have brought in full information about the enemy.

Probably you will also be surprised that Napoleon directed Bernadotte, who marched at the head, to Zeitz, and Marshal Davout to Naumburg, a distance of twenty-seven miles. Had he, instead, pushed Bernadotte on to Naumburg and Davout to Zeitz, neither corps would have had such a severe task, since they would have to march only twenty-one and a half miles. The more masterly Napoleon's dispositions of his corps have been on other occasions, the more one must be surprised at this move, and feel prompted to ask the reason.

It had been reported to him that in the direction of Zeitz no enemy had been seen. Had his patrols advanced only such a short distance as to make their reports untrustworthy? Had they again failed to serve their purpose? Was he afraid that the corps marching on Naumburg might be threatened from Zeitz unless another corps first went to that place? Is it for this reason that he first sent a corps to Zeitz and the one behind it to Naumburg?

This cannot have been the only cause. Napoleon might still have expected some troops between Zeitz and Leipzig, but he could not help assuming that the main

body of the enemy was not to be expected from that quarter. For the day before, the baggage train of Tauntzien's corps, when captured by the troops marching on Gera, was in hasty retreat on Jena and Camburg. He surely expected the enemy's main body towards the north-west, as he fronted his army in that direction by wheeling to the left.

He must have had some other reason for this move, which surprises us. It almost seems as if it was the qualities of the marshals that actuated him. Marshal Davout he had often entrusted with missions requiring independent action.<sup>1</sup> If he doubted Bernadotte's ability, his doubts were only too well justified by the latter's conduct on the 14th October and three years later at Wagram. What Marmont says in his memoirs about Napoleon's opinion of Bernadotte agrees with this. Strategical measures certainly depend sometimes upon the ability and personal qualities of the subordinate leaders, and a prudent general will take this into consideration ; for strategy is an art which cannot deal merely with mathematical lines, angles, and weights.

Still more than by the marches of Davout's and Bernadotte's corps, you will be surprised, as I am, at the confusion into which Napoleon threw his corps on the 12th October, to accomplish the left wheel of his army in one day. You know yourself how reluctantly we change the line of communication and operation of an army corps, because it requires new and difficult arrangements in rear of the corps which can rarely be carried through without dangerous mistakes. These become still more probable when two corps change lines of operations ; for then the advancing columns must cross. Such movements are terribly fatiguing to the troops. At least one column is delayed by the crossing, sometimes a whole day's march or more. Often—I may say as a rule—there

<sup>1</sup> In 1809, Davout was again put in an advanced position at Ratisbon and given a larger command than the other marshals.—ED.

is dreadful confusion at the crossings, the most striking feature of which is the entanglement of waggons, making it impossible to move forward or back, and blocking the road completely. It is, therefore, an axiom in staff duties to avoid crossing columns whenever possible.

I saw such a mess once ; and the terrible confusion, the helplessness of the drivers and column commanders are so fresh in my memory, that I still perfectly loathe it. It was after the battle of Sedan, when all our corps formed a complete circle around the enemy, and then converged on one point. Crossing of columns could not be avoided, in spite of the most circumspect precautions from headquarters, as the army was ordered to spread out by diverging roads before beginning the advance on Paris. Our army (of the Meuse) had even to make marches to the rear ; and yet later, when advancing, it met on the 6th September the trains of other corps marching right across its front.

In 1870 the trains were mostly organized military bodies, or at least under strict military guidance. What must the confusion have been in the above instance, in 1806, when they were glad to have enough service teams to pull the guns !

Blume puts the depth of an army corps on the march, including supply and transport, at twenty-four miles.<sup>1</sup> Such a corps on the march forms a long thin thread, orders passing from front to rear, and reports from the rear to the front. Two or three corps of Napoleon's army marched on the same road, and the thread was from fifty to seventy miles long ; but as the corps were to support each other in front, the trains of the leading corps probably followed behind the rear corps. Thus the long thread consisted of pieces of different and varying material. It was all right as long as all remained on the same road ; but when the points of the threads were

<sup>1</sup> Some of the French corps were then stronger, some smaller than the German are now.—ED.



twisted together, as in the French army on the 12th October, it must have caused a knot of confusion in rear very hard to undo. If I imagine myself in such a situation in charge of the supply of ammunition, as I was in 1870, I must honestly confess that I am unable to tell you how I should have acquitted myself.

Only the army commander himself can lessen the evil in such a case by sending back superior officers, like the Quartermaster-General for example, invested with dictatorial powers, to restore order. But even then disorder cannot be wholly avoided. Delay and confusion are bound to occur.

How complete was the change which Napoleon made in his corps on that day !

Of the troops, which had been marching on the middle road, only the Guards remained there ; the others (Murat's cavalry and the corps of Bernadotte and Davout) now formed the right wing. The two leading corps of the original right wing (Sault and Ney) were put in the centre, and Ney, who had been marching behind Sault, now stood abreast and to the left of him ; the two corps of the left wing were also in line instead of behind each other.

In addition to this the army changed front, facing almost due west with its back towards the frontier of neutral but unfriendly Austria, distant little more than two days' march.

All supplies had to come from the left wing and grope their way along the entire army, for the base of operations (the present kingdom of Bavaria) was now on a prolongation of the front to the left.

It was impossible for the army to remain long in this position ; but Napoleon seems to have thought it might have been necessary, for he had enjoined on the marshals to provide several days' supply of bread to make them independent of their trains.

With his experience in strategy he must have well

appreciated this situation, and it can hardly be assumed that it was caused by an error, or a wrong idea on his part. He must also have known that Prussian hussars of the Rudolf Regiment had entered Schweinfurt on the 11th, for they had taken prisoners there, captured trains and broken his line of communications.

Ten years before, at Mantua, he had astonished the world by a bold enterprise abandoning his line of communications, sacrificing his siege material, marching through the Alps round the relief army, attacking it from behind and driving it into Mantua, where it only served to increase the number of hungry mouths to be fed, and hastened the capitulation. He had acted like Cortez when he burned his ships behind him. But then he was in a critical situation and could extricate himself only by such a desperate act; he was a young soldier of fortune who had yet to gain his glory. Now he was the powerful Emperor and had no need to bring his army into a critical situation. Höpfner, therefore, criticizes Napoleon's measures of October 12th severely (pp. 489 and 490).

It seems to me that Napoleon disdained the united forces of Prussia and Saxony so much as to believe ill success impossible. This would also appear from his earlier letters and previously quoted expressions: "*Je ne sais pas ce qu'ils veulent . . . Je crois qu'ils veulent avoir une leçon . . . Nous ferons une belle campagne,*" etc., etc. It would be easy of course to practise strategy if previously assured by Providence of success in every battle. But that one cannot know in advance. Even with the greatest numerical superiority, training and efficiency of the troops, unexpected circumstances may jeopardize success.

We can see this in considering the events of October 13th. Hardly ever has an army had greater superiority over its enemy than the French had then. And yet it was only by good luck that it escaped serious blows on that day, which would have compelled it at once to halt

in a critical strategical position. This proves what I wrote you before, that war will always be uncertain, and that if you want success you must take risks after carefully considering whether the probability of success is in your favour. Here Napoleon took the risk for the sake of greater results, after coming to the conclusion that the superiority of his united masses would in all probability give him the victory. We, too, fought with reversed front at St. Privat and Gravelotte. Therefore I cannot endorse Höpfner's censure unconditionally. To risk for the sake of the great results is not amiss, provided it is done after careful deliberation.

Early on the morning of the 13th Napoleon seems to have been much in doubt what to do. It seems he had received reports from all the marshals except from Lannes. He only directed Ney to march on Roda, while Lannes was to continue his march on Jena; the Bavarians (at the head of the right column, which it seems had now come up too) were ordered to Schleiz and thus drawn to the centre of the army, while Bernadotte marched to Naumburg to join Davout. The remainder were to have a day of rest.

Now such forced marches are not made with a whole army for the sake of gaining a day's repose. If the corps needed this badly, it shows us the danger of exhausting troops by forced marches. For they mostly lead to a decisive action, otherwise they would not be made, and when troops are much in want of rest, they cannot co-operate in such a battle with full effect. If this be not the case, it may be that Napoleon was ignorant of the whereabouts of the hostile army, and did not know where to direct his corps. It is surprising to me, however, that Augereau was not sent on to Jena.

In the course of the forenoon the Emperor seems to have received Lannes' report that he had met the enemy at Lobeda, Burgau and Winzerle. He then directed Soult's corps on Roda and went to Jena himself.

In the meantime Lannes had occupied the Landgrafen-berg, near Jena, with his advanced guard, and had seen before him the whole army of Prince Hohenlohe. The report of this reached Napoleon one hour this side of Jena. He now ordered the guards and Soult to Jena. But their support came very near being too late, and on his arrival on the Landgrafenberg at 4 p.m., he might have been an eye-witness of the destruction of Marshal Lannes' corps.

Permit me to anticipate and tell you that before this, Prince Hohenlohe had put his army in motion in order to throw Lannes' weak forces into the Saale. His army was exultantly advancing to the attack when Massenbach arrived from the King of Weimar with the pernicious order, based on misconception, not to attack on that day under any circumstances. At the same time the march of the Prussian main army was delayed by an unfortunate accident, so that the defile of Kösen was not occupied on the evening of the 13th. Now suppose that these two mistakes had not occurred, then Lannes would have been destroyed on the 13th, and the Prussians would have seized the defile of Kösen, where Davout's advanced guard would perhaps have been checked.

Augereau would then have been in a very critical situation on the 14th; the other French corps would have come to a halt at the steep defiles of the Saale at Jena, Dornburg, Camburg, and Naumburg. For some days the French army behind the Saale would have been in the same situation as three years later behind the Danube after the battle of Aspern, with the only difference that it would have been in a worse predicament as to its base and communications, for Napoleon had entirely abandoned his line of retreat for the time being, and Prussian cavalry had entered Schweinfurt.

Höpfner says that, had the Prussian army been properly commanded, the enemy's movements must have brought him into such a predicament, and that

then contemporary judgment would have condemned Napoleon as much as it now praises the wisdom of his calculations. He adds: "If Napoleon appreciated the commander-in-chief and knew the depression, etc., of the Prussian army, so as to believe that he might dare any thing, he was surely justified."

I have told you once before that Napoleon was aware of his considerable superiority and could therefore risk much, and that I cannot endorse the severe censure of Napoleon's measures by Höpfner, who says he can only admire his good luck.

But when you consider that it required those two accidents to bring on such favourable results for Napoleon, you will find that to gain success in war, there is requisite besides great numerical superiority and good judgment in strategy, one more element which by most men is called "luck," by the more intelligent, "providence guiding the destinies of mankind."

Napoleon believed in this providence, his "star," as he called it. "*La balle qui me tuera, n'est pas encore fondue,*" he said at Jena. He based this belief on the successes which he had gained even where he was less superior in number, and when—according to all calculations—he had but little chance of success. Hence his confidence, which is the first requisite when risking after previous deliberation.

We find the same confidence again in our latest campaigns. In these it was not based upon previous success, on the belief in a "star," but on the righteousness of the cause.

The events of the 13th October lead to another reflection:—

Napoleon began his march closely concentrated and yet he came into a position which promised ill for success. If Hohenlohe's idea had been carried out, and if the march of the Prussian main army had not been delayed, parts of the Emperor's army might have been beaten in detail at Jena and Kösen on the 13th October.

What lessons do we learn from this? First, that the very best strategy may miscarry when there is no (or only incorrect) information of the enemy's movements. Secondly, it is impossible to march, for any length of time, so concentrated as to be able to bring all forces to bear simultaneously the first moment tactical touch is obtained with the enemy.

It is, therefore, necessary to know the proper time to concentrate. "To march divided and fight united is the greatest art in strategy,"—so says our greatest strategist. This renders it necessary for the strategist to base his deliberations on the most accurate possible information with regard to the enemy, which must be furnished by cavalry reconnaissance.

14TH OCTOBER.—When Napoleon received, near Jena, on the 13th, Lannes' report that, in all probability, he would be attacked that day, he issued orders to assemble the army at Jena. These orders he modified and completed after he had a view of the enemy from the Landgrafenberg, and during the night of the 13th-14th the army stood as follows: Lannes' corps and the Guards, in front of and on the Landgrafenberg, Augereau on the Galgenberg above Jena, Ney at Roda with advanced guard towards Jena, Soult on a night march to Jena, where the head of his column arrived. Murat's cavalry, recalled from the detached right wing of the army, was on the right bank between Camburg and Dornburg; Bernadotte had joined Davout at Naumburg. Thus the day's rest intended for the 13th came to naught. Davout's corps alone did not march on that day.

According to the dispositions for the battle given by Höpfner (p. 369), Napoleon united Augereau, Lannes, the Guards, Ney, Soult and Murat against the enemy's front at Jena. The marshals Davout and Bernadotte were to march on Apolda by way of Naumburg, Kösen and Camburg to attack the enemy in flank and rear.

You see again how poorly Napoleon was served by his cavalry. For as there was reason to expect the enemy

from the north-west, strong forces of cavalry should have been pushed forward in that direction, to cover the left flank of the army during its march to the north on the 12th October. He also believed the troops spread out before him to be the united forces of the enemy. But in fact there was only a small part, the army of Prince Hohenlohe, opposed to him. To deal with this the dispositions of the army were made, while the chief portion of the enemy was ignored, and Napoleon was surprised to learn of its existence.

It is not astonishing to find that the Emperor, with his threefold superiority, crushed Prince Hohenlohe's army and finally disorganized it by means of his numerous cavalry on the plateau, which is perfectly open as far as Weimar.

Davout, while passing through the defile of Kösen with his 30,000 men, met the enemy's main army more than twice his superior in numbers. His skill in directing the combat, the adroitness of his troops, the superiority of skirmishing tactics over linear tactics, enabled him not only to hold his ground, but to push nearly five miles forward.

The Prussian main army was not exactly beaten at Auerstädt. Its attacks were repulsed, and then the order to retreat was given without bringing its numerous reserve into action. Davout's troops suffered terribly and had reached the limit of their fighting capacity. They had lost 270 officers and 7000 men, i.e. one quarter of their strength. The ill-success at Auerstädt did not become a defeat for the Prussians until a few days later, when the dejection of the troops, the pursuit, and the destruction of the other army completed it.

Bernadotte's conduct on the 14th is very strange. Napoleon had ordered him to Apolda, by way of Camburg, to act there jointly with Davout (who was to advance by Kösen and Eckardsberga) against the enemy's left flank and rear. The presence of considerable Prussian forces

near Sulza beyond the Ilm was reported to him at nine o'clock at Camburg, and that is the reason he gives for going by way of Dornburg. It is hard to understand this reasoning; for the presence of the Prussian forces at Sulza clearly showed him that Napoleon's supposition that the Prussian right wing was at Apolda was wrong. His orders to co-operate with Davout should, when he saw the Prussian forces, have confirmed Bernadotte in his original intention to cross the Saale at Camburg, and he should have attacked the troops at Sulza. If you imagine Bernadotte, who was at Camburg at nine o'clock, appearing at eleven o'clock at Sulza in rear of the Prussian main army, then hotly engaged with Davout, you cannot help feeling convinced that the main army would have been disintegrated at Auerstädt.

I find it difficult to appreciate Bernadotte's train of thought. It was not his adherence to the exact words of Napoleon's order that caused him to act as he did, for he took the liberty of choosing a point, other than that prescribed, to cross the Saale. Hence he must have been fully aware that although a detached commander, and above all the commanding general, of an army corps must always comply with his superior's ideas, he may often find himself compelled to act contrary to the letter of his orders, though still in accord with the wishes of his chief. That is, he must use his judgment in obeying, must unite initiative with obedience. It almost looks as though Bernadotte was one of those strategists who prefer to attain their object by manœuvring rather than by battle, and who like to avoid fighting. His conduct at Wagram seems to confirm this.

If my supposition be correct that Bernadotte's strategical views were thus diametrically opposed to those of his great master, then he must be exonerated from the often-repeated charge that in 1813, as Crown Prince of Sweden, he was slow in carrying out his duties toward the allies for the sake of sparing Napoleon.



Before I turn to the strategical measures of the Prussians up to the moment of collision on the 14th October, I must call your attention to the marches accomplished by the French troops.

After the two days' rest which Napoleon gave his army, to prepare for great efforts to be required of them, his corps made the following marches:—

Soult, on the 8th October 14½ miles, on the 9th 14½ miles (to Hof), on the 10th 19 miles (to Plauen), on the 11th 14 miles (to Langen Wetzendorf), on the 12th 19 miles (to Gera), on the 13th the corps was intended to rest, but on the night of the 13th-14th it had to march between 24 and 29 miles (to Jena). Thus after marching over 80 miles in five days, the corps was intended to halt for four-and-twenty hours. But the necessity of hurrying forward for the battle, compelled a forced march in place of a complete day's rest.

On the 8th Ney marched about 14½ miles, on the 9th the same distance (Münchberg), on the 10th nearly 27 miles (Gefel—Tanna), on the 11th 9½ miles, on the 12th 14½ miles (Mittel Pöllnitz); thus he also marched over 80 miles in five days, when on the 13th half a day's rest was given him (he was only to march to Roda, 1½ miles), and it is well known half a day's rest is as good as none.

Bernadotte marched 14½ miles on the 8th, on the 9th 19 miles (Ottersdorf near Schleiz), on the 10th 14½ miles (Auma—Triptis), on the 11th 19 miles (Gera), on the 12th 14½ miles (Zeitz), and on the 13th 14½ miles (Naumburg), i.e. 95 miles in six days.

Davout and the Guards marching behind Bernadotte did the same distances up to the 11th, then Davout marched 28½ miles on the 12th to Naumburg, making 95 miles in five days. But then no further march was required of him on the 13th, and he was allowed to rest in spite of the critical situation on that day.

The Guards had marched over 80 miles to Gera by the

12th, and were to rest on the 13th, but on account of Marshal Lannes' critical position, they had to march 28½ miles from noon until they arrived on the Landgrafenberg late at night. That makes 110 miles in six days.

Lannes marched 14½ miles on the 8th October, on the 9th 19 miles to Gräfenenthal, on the 10th 14½ miles (Saalfeld), when in addition he had a fight. On the 11th 19 miles to Neustadt, on the 12th 14½ miles towards Jena, making over 80 miles marched in five days, besides an engagement on one of them. On the 13th the presence of superior forces of the enemy prevented him from getting farther than the Landgrafenberg.

Augereau marched only a few miles less during this period.

Most of the corps did about 80 miles in the five marching days from October 8th to 12th inclusive. Their experienced commander then ordered a day's rest, but he did not hesitate to give it up, when the opportunity offered for a decisive stroke, and to exact still greater efforts followed by a battle. For some corps had to make night marches and then to fight.

I will now compare these efforts with those of the German army in 1870, and will only mention the marches of our Guard Corps, because I was an eye-witness to them. On the 9th of August the corps rested, then it marched 14½, 5, 19, 9½, 17, 9½, 12, 24 miles, and on the morning of the battle of St. Privat 14½ miles, when, from noon, it took a decisive part in the battle. This performance falls a little short of that of Napoleon's corps, as theirs averages rather more than 14½ miles a day. The corps left behind only 500 footsore men as garrison of Dieulouard. How many men the French corps left on the road cannot be ascertained now. It is possible, and probable too, that the French corps were more experienced in marching, for they had had years of practice, whereas the Prussians in 1870 came from their ordinary quarters,

and half of them were reservists, who had to wear new boots, and all had made long journeys by rail, which cause swelling of the feet. (Do not be surprised if I talk about boots while writing on strategy. The boot is the most important factor in infantry marching, and plays a prominent part in strategy.)

After a day's rest on the 22nd of August the Guard Corps marched on the 23rd 17 miles, then 12, 19, 19, 14½, 9, 9, 14½, 19 miles, and 14½ miles more by dawn of September 1st in order to take part in the decisive battle of Sedan. That makes 167 miles and a decisive battle in ten days. But the loss due to the hard work of these marches amounted to between 5000 and 6000 men.<sup>1</sup>

As I have stated above, it cannot be ascertained now what the losses of the French corps were in 1806 from these forced marches. But you must acknowledge that they were well broken in to marching, since after such exertions they were still able to win a great victory.

To what a high pitch of training they were brought by this war, is shown by their extraordinary performances on the bad roads of East Prussia and Poland when concentrating in 1807.

I must call your attention to the fact that it is usually presumed that a battalion can march 14½ miles a day for three days, but must rest on the fourth day, if its powers are not to be overtaxed. Now if you consider that when the whole corps marches 14½ miles, single battalions may have to do 9½ miles more, you will allow that the six days' march of the French corps to the battle of Jena, the nine days' march of the Prussian Guard to the battle of St. Privat, and the ten days' march of the same corps to the battle of Sedan, are enormous efforts which cannot easily be surpassed. You must not forget that when

<sup>1</sup> This seems a very large number. If accurate, it means that at Sedan the Guards cannot have had more than 11,000 or 12,000 infantry engaged.—ED.

concentrating the large masses of troops necessary for a decisive battle, provisions can never be issued with such regularity as in the case of single battalions or in time of peace, and that want of regular rations lowers the physical powers. Add to this the excitement and strain of a decisive battle, and you will understand how unstrung both body and mind must become as soon as the fighting is over.

This explains why a victory is often not fully turned to account by an energetic pursuit. For it requires an immense will power on the part of a leader to exact from his terribly tired troops the hardships of an unrelenting pursuit, and it requires an almost superhuman self-sacrifice on the part of the troops to fully respond to this demand instead of giving themselves up to the rest to which they believe themselves so justly entitled.

But on the other hand it is clear what a terrible effect an energetic pursuit must produce, because the exhaustion of the vanquished troops is doubled and trebled by the mental depression of defeat. This is confirmed by the historical fact that the Prussian army after Auerstädt, where it had suffered repulse but not defeat, was afterwards totally dissolved by pursuit.

No one can appreciate the exhausted state of troops after any particular battle who has not himself been present at it; and it is, therefore, impossible to criticize what was done immediately after the action or deduce therefrom lessons for the future.

We shall, therefore, not go into the strategical operations after the battle of the 14th October, 1806.

## FOURTH LETTER.

### PRUSSIAN MOVEMENTS FROM 8TH TO 13TH OCTOBER.

BEFORE examining the steps taken by the Prussians from the 8th to the 13th October I must refer you back to the consultations which were held at Erfurt beginning on the 4th October (Höpfner, pp. 208-221).

The Duke of Brunswick presided at them, and the King was present part of the time.

They resulted in the decision to give up the idea of taking the offensive because it was too late to do so, and to assemble the army in a position behind the Thuringian Forest in order to fall upon the enemy as he advanced. I have mentioned this determination before, and Höpfner has given the details of these consultations better than I can. But what I wish to bring out is the fact that they prove how disastrous may be the consequences of such councils of war.

The result was not wrong in itself considering the circumstances, but the fact that differences of opinion arose, that no one of the opinions was definitely adopted, but that the final resolve was in the shape of a compromise, confirmed every one in his own opinion and raised in him the belief that his plan would finally prevail.

The Duke of Brunswick was of the opinion—and no one will now say that he was wrong—that Prussia would be defeated. Therefore he wished to avoid the war altogether. But in the face of the humiliations to which the country was subjected, he did not dare to say so.

Deceived by diplomatic reports, he believed that Napoleon did not want war—that he, at least, wanted to avoid appearing as the aggressor. If Prussia then remained on the defensive, the Duke still hoped that hostilities might be avoided and matters arranged amicably. What we wish for, we like to hope and believe.

The King clearly recognized the fact that war was unavoidable, and he had also become convinced that the time was past for taking the offensive. He judged Napoleon rightly, believing that the latter would not lose a single day for the purpose of posing as a lover of peace. No one will deny that under such circumstances a concentrated position was the only proper one, so as to fall upon the enemy in whatever direction he might appear.

Prince Hohenlohe's idea, too, of moving forward on Hof in order to have a straight line of retreat and not be separated from Saxony from the beginning, had much in its favour, especially if it had been carried out before Napoleon could interfere with its execution.

But the evil was that all these divergent opinions were more or less entertained. The Duke of Brunswick retained his hope of avoiding the war, if he could only prevent Prince Hohenlohe from taking the offensive. To Prince Hohenlohe it had been conceded to cross to the right bank of the Saale and to then advance should the enemy threaten to turn the left flank of the Prussian army. At the same time, all were agreed that such probably was Napoleon's plan. The King wrote this to Rüchel on the 7th October (cf. p. 218). No wonder Prince Hohenlohe kept constantly in view the passage to the right bank of the Saale, and made arrangements and gave instructions to that end. We shall see that the misfortune of the 10th October, and the loss of an opportunity for a partial but decisive victory on the 13th, were the consequences of these divergent opinions.

The men assembled at Erfurt on the 4th and 5th

October were reputed the wisest by the King as well as the army. Brunswick, Hohenlohe, Rüchel, Möllendorf were the most tried leaders ; Phull and Massenbach were considered the most scientific military authorities by their contemporaries. Kleist, Scharnhorst, Rauch and Müffling have proved later on that their selection was a good one. And yet the consequences of this council of war were disastrous. Nothing shows more clearly than these proceedings at Erfurt, that a council of war should never be held.

On the 8th October fairly accurate information of the enemy was received at Royal Headquarters. Müffling reported that the French army was moving from Bamberg in a north-easterly direction, and proposed to assail it with cavalry in flank and rear.

The movement which the King had anticipated in his letter to Rüchel of the 7th October was now taking place ; Napoleon was marching straight on Berlin and threatening to turn the left flank of the Prussian army.

The movement indicated in these circumstances from a central defensive position, was a concentration to the left, so as to attack the enemy's left wing on its left flank.

We see that the measures ordered from the Royal Headquarters of 8th October agree with this view. Höpfner only finds fault with the fact that for the side issue proposed by Müffling, too many troops, especially infantry, were detached, 11,000 men being thus lost to the main army. When only half as strong as the adversary, there is double reason to be chary of every man that is detached and so lost to the main engagement. For it is impossible to be too strong, at any rate for a decisive battle.

Compare with this the arrangements made by the Commander-in-Chief of the Prussian armies for the battle of Königgrätz :—"The attack by the whole Prussian forces which had crossed the Bohemian frontier on the offensive seemed to be fully secured" (Official account,

p. 261). Not a man was detached to observe Josephstadt, although it was not known for certain whether a part of the hostile army was not behind the Elbe, on the line Josephstadt-Königgrätz.

The general sense of the orders for the 8th October was for the main army to move to the left and concentrate on the 10th at Kranichfeld, Tannroda, Blankenhayn, Magdala; the army of Prince Hohenlohe to reach the Saale on the 10th between Cahla and Rudolstadt from Hochdorf (near Blankenhayn): the corps of Rüchel and Prince Eugen of Württemberg to draw nearer to the main army. This would enable them to crush the left wing of the French army, Lannes or Augereau, or both, on the 11th or 12th October.

But on the 9th October we find neither initiative nor co-operation on the part of the subordinate leaders in carrying out the disposition, especially in the case of Prince Hohenlohe's army. This was the first consequence of the council of war in which the idea of Massenbach and the Prince to take the offensive on the right bank of the Saale, had not only not been promptly rejected, but even, at the last, adopted. Both therefore saw in the move ordered not a concentration on the left bank of the Saale, but a movement preparatory to the passage of the entire army to the right bank. Colonel von Massenbach was so convinced that the crossing of the entire army to the right bank of the Saale alone could save the Fatherland, that he made up his mind to compel the main army to follow suit, by the crossing of Hohenlohe's corps, even if this should not be in accordance with the plan of the Commander-in-Chief. He did not say so to his general, whose spirit of obedience he knew. He only explained to him that the move ordered had no other purpose than to cross the entire forces to the right bank of the Saale.

It was, therefore, not considered necessary at Hohenlohe's headquarters to concentrate on the 9th at Hoch-



dorf. Of what use was it to bring the Saxons to the left bank when they were to advance again to the right bank after the 10th October? The Prussian troops of Hohenlohe's corps were also left in their cantonments around Jena, because from there they could easily be assembled at Hochdorf on the 9th in case of emergency, and march on the 10th to Rudolstadt and Cahla.

We do not intend to criticize, as I wrote you before, but where lessons are to be deduced from events, criticism cannot be avoided if we are to investigate the circumstances which caused disaster, and which are therefore to be avoided in the future.

If we ask ourselves whether Prince Hohenlohe was justified in deviating on the 9th from the orders he received, we must concede that it is the duty of every detached commander, at any rate when commanding an army, or even an army corps, to modify the execution of orders when local circumstances require it, so as to attain in the best way the object of the Commander-in-Chief. The only question therefore is, whether the Prince was justified in assuming that it was the intention of the Commander-in-Chief to cross to the right bank of the Saale. Knowing what we do of the council of war at Erfurt, this question cannot be entirely answered in the negative, and the Duke of Brunswick wrote to the Prince as late as October 9th:—"It is not at all my intention to await the enemy on this side of the Saale." In my estimation, therefore, a sentence should have been added at the beginning of the instructions issued from Royal Headquarters on the 8th October, which would have clearly indicated the intentions of the Commander-in-Chief. This sentence should have read as follows:—"The main army and Hohenlohe's corps are to concentrate on the 10th October on the left bank of the Saale between Kranichfeld, Tannroda, Blankenhayn, Magdala, Rudolstadt and Cahla in such a position that they can assail the enemy with united forces as opportunity offers."

Had such an explanation preceded the instructions, Prince Hohenlohe might have been charged with disobedience of orders for keeping the Saxons on the right bank. He would not have dared to do it, and Massenbach would not have directed the whole of the supply columns and train, etc., which afterwards caused so much confusion and calamity, to the right bank of the Saale, when he knew that operations were to be carried on from a position on the left bank. All the unfavourable circumstances which during the next few days caused the supply trains to miss their destinations and the troops to go hungry, must be ascribed to this indecision and vacillation. If you compare the measures of the Commander-in-Chief of the 8th October with the instructions and orders which were issued in our army in 1866 and 1870-71, you will find that they always, even in subordinate commands, begin with the general intention in this way: 1st, "I intend to . . . ." 2nd, "Therefore I direct that . . . ." This mere detail of the literary composition of orders has the greatest effect on the conduct of strategy.

With regard to Colonel von Massenbach's intention of drawing the main army to the right bank of the Saale by the movements of Hohenlohe's corps, against the will of the Commander-in-Chief, it must be strongly condemned. So long as a subordinate leader must act independently owing to the distance from headquarters, he may deviate so far from his orders as local circumstances differ from those supposed by the Commander-in-Chief; but even then the changes he may make must still be in harmony with the known general intentions of the latter. Still, even when thus detached to indulge in a policy and strategy of his own is always injurious and can only lead to needless marches and countermarches, which occupy time and lead to indecision and confusion. To act against the expressed will of the Commander-in-Chief, to try and compel him to change his intentions, is forbidden to any subordinate. He can look for his own

salvation only in a full and hearty co-operation with the ideas of his chief. To encroach on the functions of the latter is most reprehensible. Whatever his own inclination may have been, Colonel von Massenbach could never have acted in this manner, if he had merely received orders instead of being called, with his chief, to the council of war at Royal Headquarters. This again shows the evil results which may ensue from such an assembly.

You may, perhaps, bring forward in contrary sense (i.e. the independent action of an army) Blücher's advance on Paris in 1814, which, beginning early in March, led to the battles of Laon and a victorious termination of the war. To this I reply, that Blücher did not act as he did until he had received from the monarchs a favourable reply to his letter. However, you probably do not consider any more than I do that the conduct of this war by the headquarters of the allied armies is worthy of imitation.

Perhaps you will mention York and Tauroggen? But the political circumstances towards the end of 1812 were so extraordinary that no rules for strategy can be based on them. It was not a question of strategy when York entered into the convention of Tauroggen, it was a question of politics. He said himself: "I am risking my neck in my old age" (see York's Life by Droyssen).

To return to the campaign of 1806. On the 8th, Tauentzien was pushed back by the enemy, and after several not unfavourable rear-guard engagements, reached Schleiz in the evening, whence he sent in his report to Prince Hohenlohe.

9TH OCTOBER.—The correspondence between Prince Hohenlohe and the Duke of Brunswick—which Höpfner gives at length, p. 237 to 248—confirms the fact that the Prince still clung to the idea that the Commander-in-Chief intended to adopt his plan and to advance beyond the Saale. He made his arrangements for this day accordingly, especially in his instructions to Prince Louis Ferdinand. Part of the Saxons were directed

towards the road between Dürren Ebersdorf and Mittel Pöllnitz, and his Prussian troops were ordered to cross the Saale and march to Mittel Pöllnitz.

About noon the Duke wrote a letter in which he stated that it was not his intention to await the enemy on the left bank of the Saale. I have already mentioned that the Prince did and could see in this a confirmation of his view that an early passage of the Saale was contemplated. The Duke, indeed, added that he would leave it to the discretion of the Prince to call in the Saxon battalions and await the arrival of the main army before beginning to cross the river. But the former were already on the further bank, and it was useless to bring them back. In the meantime, too, General von Tauentzien's favourable report of the first part of the engagement at Schleiz arrived. The Prince therefore did not order the Prussian troops to pass the Saale, and disposed the Saxons so that they might succour Tauentzien if necessary. For though this general had been victorious up to the time of his report, it was probable that the advancing enemy would be reinforced and make it necessary that he be relieved by fresh troops.

In the meantime Massenbach had reported that between Cahla and Rudolstadt there was no point favourable for assembling the army. According to our present notions I fail to see how such a report could be made or credited. And even according to the then existing ideas on army leading, which required for camping purposes large, wide, open plains,<sup>1</sup> this report is strange, for the orders were not for the whole force to go into camp there, but only for the troops to move into that district. They could be provided for in the numerous villages there just as well as they had been up to that time around Jena. Grawert's division moved after all to Orlamünde and found sufficient room there. Massenbach's report therefore appears to be a deliberately

<sup>1</sup> In the Prussian Army only.—Ed.

created difficulty to make the execution of the orders of the Commander-in-Chief impossible, and so draw the army to the right bank of the Saale. Another evil consequence of his presence at the council of war at Erfurt!

It was only at 9.30 p.m., 9th October, that the Duke sent positive orders to the Prince to assemble his army on the left bank of the Saale.

In the course of the afternoon General Count von Tauentzien had been defeated and retreated to Schleiz, arriving at 4 a.m., to seek protection behind the Saxons. The report of this did not reach headquarters until the 10th, and had therefore no influence on the strategic plans made on the previous day. But the part assigned in them to Count Tauentzien, to cover Saxony, was no longer practicable.

I cannot consider my remarks on the 9th October complete without calling your attention to another matter which was also harmful to the Prussian army, and which became apparent on that day. The Prince of Hohenlohe calculated on being able to reach the position of Mittell Pöllnitz on the 10th with the Prussian and Saxon troops by several roads. As it turned out afterward, Bernadotte had reached Auma, Triptis and Neustadt on the 10th, and Murat advanced half a day's march beyond this line (total  $47\frac{1}{2}$  miles on the 8th, 9th, and 10th of October). Hence, had the Prince attempted to make the intended march from Jena, he would have been attacked in flank by Bernadotte and Murat. None of his instructions mentions the possibility of such an encounter, and the Prince seems to have believed that he would be able to make the march undisturbed. This proves that the Prussian army was ignorant of the great marching powers of the French army. When it was first reported to the Duke of Brunswick that the French troops were expected to reach Naumburg on the 12th October, he did not believe it, and said, "They can no more fly than we can."

The engagement at Saalfeld is very instructive, owing to the relations between its origin and result. In considering it, we shall find new proof of how disastrous may be the consequences of a council of war in which the subordinate leaders have participated.

It is a common tradition that Prince Louis, carried away by his ardour, entered into an unfavourable engagement, and became the victim of his imprudence. Höpfner's narrative from documentary evidence contradicts this. You will probably, like myself, consider it superfluous to enter into the details of the engagement, which are very well described by the historian. We will only consider the motives which must have been guiding the Prince, i.e., the strategical situation in which he was placed, and the strategical questions that came up before him for solution.

On the 9th October he had marched from Stadtilm to Rudolstadt, and the advanced party of his advanced guard was at Saalfeld. He believed that on the 10th the main army was to march to Blankenhayn and its vicinity. But Hohenlohe, who had been ordered to take position between Cahla and Rudolstadt, had communicated to him his intention to begin the passage of the Saale (which he thought was contemplated by the whole army) on the 10th and concentrate his forces at Pöllnitz. If this move were made, the Prince was to march on Prössneck and form the advanced guard of Hohenlohe's army on the right bank, as he had heretofore done on the left bank. The Prince therefore could not but think that on the 10th a general move to the left would be made by the whole army, Hohenlohe's army crossing the Saale and the main army taking its place. This move of Hohenlohe's army to the left he was to cover by his march from Rudolstadt and Saalfeld to Prössneck. But the road to Prössneck crossed to the right bank at Saalfeld and led in an easterly direction. Thus he was to make a flank march in the face of the enemy to cover

Hohenlohe's army, and this flank march compelled him to cross the Saale at Saalfeld.

Let us now consider the distances. The main forces of the Prince were at Rudolstadt—Blankenburg,  $9\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Orlamünde, where Grawert's division was bivouacking; part of Hohenlohe's army, which he was to cover, was  $9\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Blankenhayn, where the main army was to arrive that day, and  $9\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Prössneck, the point he was to occupy, when Hohenlohe's army crossed the Saale. The advanced troops were at Saalfeld, whence the road leads straight to Prössneck, but  $9\frac{1}{2}$  miles distant. At Saalfeld therefore he covered both armies—Hohenlohe's and the main army. Marching from Rudolstadt to Prössneck, he might easily arrive too late if he waited for the report of the passage of Hohenlohe's army over the Saale; not so from Saalfeld, because from there he would be retreating before the enemy, against whom he was to cover this army.

Prince Louis was informed of the advance of superior forces of the enemy as far as Gräfenenthal,  $9\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Saalfeld. He saw the enemy's camp fires from the castle at Rudolstadt; and all the more he felt it to be his duty to hold Saalfeld, because the advancing enemy might cross the Saale at Saalfeld and fall upon the flank of the troops of Hohenlohe's corps which were marching from Cahla to Neustadt. But it was the duty of the Prince to cover these troops, since he formed the advanced guard of Hohenlohe's army. If he crossed the Saale before the enemy's approach, he might be able, from the right bank, to prevent the enemy from crossing and thus cover Hohenlohe's corps; but this would uncover the main army, which he thought was marching on Magdala. Therefore he believed it his duty to hold Saalfeld until relieved by an advanced guard from the main army.

If I imagine myself in the situation of Prince Louis as commander of a division acting as the advanced guard of an army marching from Jena—Cahla to Neustadt—

Pöllnitz, the vanguard pushed forward to Saalfeld, the main body echeloned back as far as Rudolstadt, I can see nothing else to do but to march to Saalfeld, if it be threatened from Gräfenenthal. But then I should hold the defile of Saalfeld on the 10th until informed that Hohenlohe's army has so far progressed on its flank march, that it can no longer be disturbed or threatened from Saalfeld. But from that moment my line of retreat would lie east on Prössneck, and not northward on Rudolstadt.

It cannot be said that the Prince neglected anything required by the rules of prudent strategy. He was not satisfied merely with reporting his plan to his immediate corps commander, he sent a duplicate at the same time straight to the King and asked that a special advanced guard might be pushed forward from the main army to Saalfeld on the 10th to relieve him. This report he made on the evening of the 9th as soon as he had determined what he was going to do.

If we come to the conclusion that the Prince engaged the enemy neither imprudently nor without purpose, I must also assert that he did not unduly prolong the fight, considering its object.

He was compelled to hold Saalfeld until he knew that Hohenlohe's army would no longer be endangered by the loss of this point of passage over the Saale, or until he knew that another advanced guard was coming to relieve him. After the army had accomplished the passage of the river, the Prince's line of retreat was in the direction of Prössneck, but until then he had to base himself on Rudolstadt. Hence he had to hold his ground at Saalfeld until he knew in what direction he would have to retire, or until the advanced guard of the main army arrived, for which he had asked. He was thus compelled to sacrifice himself, but the responsibility rests not on him, but on the circumstances which brought him into this desperate position.

There have been critics who have blamed the Prince for



holding Saalfeld after his right wing had been turned by Lannes, thus threatening his line of retreat to Rudolstadt. But I cannot endorse this censure either, for the Prince was in hopes that the advanced guard requested from the main army would soon arrive from Rudolstadt to relieve him from the task of covering it on the left bank of the Saale, and for his own safety it was of the first importance to cover the road to Prössneck. Here, then, we see strategical considerations playing a commanding part in a tactical engagement. Tactics were subservient to strategy.

That the Prussians offered such slight and short resistance, was not the Prince's fault—was beyond his power to alter; for the leaders of the Prussian army were still labouring under the delusion that the linear tactics of the eighteenth century would, under the guidance of Prussian discipline, prove superior to the French skirmishing tactics.

When the report of the Prince as to his plan for the 10th of October reached his superiors, they recognized his danger, but it was too late for a different order to reach him.

It was only at 7 p.m. that Prince Hohenlohe finally relinquished his plan of sending the Prussian troops to the right bank of the Saale on the 10th October, but he still wished to keep the Saxons there, and it was only at 9 30 p.m. that the Duke of Brunswick sent him positive orders to assemble his army on the left bank of the Saale (Höpfner, pp. 246 and 247). Yet the Prince did not resolve on abandoning the right bank and ordering the Saxons also to the left bank, until after the result of the engagement at Saalfeld had been reported to him (Höpfner, p. 287). It does not appear from Höpfner's narrative whether, on the evening of the 9th, information was sent from the headquarters of Hohenlohe's army that the idea of crossing the Saale on the 10th had been dropped, but the King wrote to him to this effect. This letter,

however, never reached the Prince. Thus he remained in the belief, up to his death, that he was to cover this flank march and then to retire on Prössneck.

It is interesting and instructive to investigate what were the strategical causes which led to the disaster of Saalfeld, leaving out of consideration the fact that linear tactics were of little avail against skirmishing tactics. As the most direct strategical causes, we have already recognized the state of uncertainty in which Prince Louis was up to the time of his death, and the two lines of retreat which he thought he must hold. Hence we must inquire how it came that the Prince was left in this state of uncertainty.

If Prince Hohenlohe's army had implicitly obeyed the orders issued at Erfurt at 1 p.m., October 8th (Höpfner, pp. 231 and 232), if it had been assembled at Hochdorf (near Blankenhayn) on the 9th, and if it had reached the Saale between Cahla and Rudolstadt on the 10th, it could never have entered the mind of Prince Louis to march to Saalfeld and there hold the defile. At the most, he would have sent a small force to remove the stores from the magazine at Saalfeld to Rudolstadt. Being in direct and close communication with the entire army, and restricted to the right bank of the Saale, he might have retired on Schwarza and then on Rudolstadt in good time upon the approach of superior forces, even supposing he had advanced with his main body from Rudolstadt.

Is Prince Hohenlohe to be condemned for not obeying the order to the letter? We have seen that he was somewhat justified in believing that the move from Hochdorf to the Saale was but preliminary to the passage of this river. The Duke had practically approved his views of the case in the reply which he sent to a report from the Prince, and had added, moreover, as above stated, that it was not at all his intention to await the enemy on the left bank of the Saale.

There have been critics who charge Prince Hohenlohe with disobedience of orders, because he kept part of his army on the right bank. But the commander of an army cannot, and must not, restrict himself to a literal obedience of orders. He must make such modifications as may be required by local circumstances not known when the orders were issued. But these modifications must be in accord with and meet the general instructions of the Commander-in-Chief. Frederick the Great made those of his subordinate leaders feel his displeasure who obeyed his orders to the letter and failed to make timely modifications on their own responsibility whenever required by a change of the situation—among them his own brother and the Duke of Bevern. Napoleon did the same. If we accept the idea that the move from Hochdorf towards the Saale was to be preliminary to a passage of that river, the Prince was justified in not leaving the right bank on the 9th, and abandoning it to the enemy, only to reoccupy it on the 10th or 11th, now that the Saxons were already standing at Roda.

Is the Duke of Brunswick to be condemned for not rejecting at once and decidedly the idea of crossing the Saale, and for failing to order the concentration on the left bank as early as the 8th or morning of the 9th October and as positively as he did at 9.30 p.m. on the 9th?

This view also cannot be maintained! The idea of a passage of the Saale had neither been accepted nor rejected in the council of war at Erfurt. In that council every member had a vote, and the Duke did not count for more than Prince Hohenlohe. The latter might still prevail with his plan. And it was not such a bad one either, if only executed in good time and with energy and perseverance. Thus on the morning of the 9th, the Duke did not know himself, if he would not have to adopt the Prince's plan, as the King was not unfavourably disposed toward it (see Höpfner, p. 293). The report of Tauentzien's retreat before superior forces seems to have been

the thing that determined the Duke to unite his army.

What was the cause of all this uncertainty? Solely and wholly the fact that a council of war was held, the consequence of which was doubt on the part of the Commander-in-Chief which plan to adopt, and half-measures, with the result that Prince Louis at Saalfeld did not know what to do, and could not avoid defeat.

I must point out to you yet another result which arose from it, and which contributed to the disaster, which is that, by not following out the instructions first given, Hohenlohe's army became too far separated from the army of which it formed the advanced guard.

Now an advanced guard must be pushed far enough ahead to serve its purpose. This is to delay the advance of a superior enemy long enough to give the main body time to form for battle or to retire, and to prevent small detachments of the enemy from disturbing the rest of the main body. But if the advanced guard be too far in advance of the main body, it cannot receive timely succour when pressed by a greatly superior opponent, and is therefore in danger. The time between the appearance of the heads of the columns of the enemy and their deployment, must bear a proper relation to the time intervening between the departure of the report to the main body and the arrival of help from it.

It was impossible for assistance, sent from Cahla and Jena, to reach the advanced guard engaged at Saalfeld in time.

10TH OCTOBER.—On the morning the allied army was distributed as follows :—

Of Hohenlohe's corps.

Tauentzien and the Saxons were at Pöllnitz.

. Two small detachments (Boguslawski and Schimmelpennig) at Neustadt and Pössneck.

The advanced guard of Prince Louis echeloned from Rudolstadt to Blankenhayn and Saalfeld.

Grawert's division at Orlamünde.

The reserve under General Senitz at Loboda and Jena.

The main army was closely cantoned around Erfurt, advanced guard under the Duke of Weimar between Schmalkalden and Meiningen.

Rüchel between Eisenach and Gotha.

Blücher between Creutzburg and Eisenach, a detachment at Vach.

Thus the army still had a front of  $85\frac{1}{2}$  miles.

According to the orders of the 8th October, the main army moved during the 10th from the above position to Blankenhayn-Hochdorf and the vicinity, excepting the reserves ordered to Jena. The head of Rüchel's column reached Erfurt, Blücher's troops a point between Eisenach and Gotha.

After the receipt of the report of the engagement at Saalfeld, the troops of Prince Hohenlohe's army were so directed as to unite them at Jena on the left bank of the Saale. These orders did not arrive until late in the afternoon, and most of the troops had to march during the night from the 10th to the 11th October. This greatly fatigued the Saxon troops, who had stood all day in line of battle at Pölnitz awaiting the enemy, and still more Tauentzien's troops who, after fighting for two days, were making their second night march. Worst of all, was the fact that the supply trains did not come up which had been ordered to Gera by Massenbach, who assumed the passage of the army to the right bank as certain. Thus not only could they not reach the troops, but they were also in danger of being captured by the enemy during their flank march. The troops had had insufficient rations ever since the 9th, for the bread they carried was not baked sufficiently and became mouldy.

Nothing interferes so much with a regular issue of rations to troops as uncertainty in making strategical arrangements, marches, countermarches, orders, and counter orders. For provision trains are not rapid in

their movements, and cannot have their direction changed every moment on account of the distance which they must remain in rear. Nothing reduces and discourages troops more than hunger. I have seen defeated troops regain their entire confidence by an encouraging word from their commander. But they were well fed. The *morale* of troops reduced by hunger cannot be continually kept up merely by appeals to sentiment, it is necessary to feed them. Old Radetzky told me once: "A soldier, to be worth much, must have a full stomach."

Höpfner sharply censures the march of the main army to Blankenhayn-Hochdorf as useless, and inclines more toward Scharnhorst's proposition to move off by the left flank and oppose the enemy farther back between the Saale and the Elster. I cannot altogether endorse this opinion, for if the army had done so Blücher and Rüchel's troops could not have joined it in time. But the army was small and ought to have been got together before accepting battle. The concentration of the main army at Blankenhayn, and of Hohenlohe's army at Jena, brought the available forces closer, so that they could act united, and were in a position to wait for Rüchel and Blücher's troops.

The concentration of all the troops immediately available could have but the one purpose, viz., to act together, and not to disperse again without good reason. Thus there would have been an opportunity for the main army to attack Lannes on the 11th, and, in conjunction with Hohenlohe's corps, to attack Augereau on the 12th and to push these corps into the Saale. The weaker can only win by beating with united forces in succession parts of the stronger. The opportunity must be watched for and quickly seized. It was offered by the French, as events show.

According to the letters of the king to Rüchel it was intended to concentrate on the left and assail the enemy's flank, if he tried to turn the Prussian left.

Höpfner, however, approves the move to Hochdort conditionally (pp. 293 and 294) on it having been intended to defeat the enemy's left wing; but he denies that this was the case. I, on the contrary, think it was.

That it was not carried out is another matter, and it is very interesting to inquire why, on the evening of the 10th October, it was not mentioned at all at the Royal Head-quarters.

The Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of Brunswick, had, as already stated, been hoping up to October 8th that war might still be avoided, because he believed a successful issue impossible. That it broke out after all, upset this experienced commander. He despaired of the result, and he who is without confidence, is without initiative, and half defeated. Then came the news of the unsuccessful engagement at Saalfeld. This advanced guard engagement, entailing a loss of 2000 men, was in itself of small importance, for an advance guard which is pushed back must always suffer losses. Neither was the general situation at all affected by the action, nor was the position of the army in any way compromised. But the unsuccessful issue of the first encounter with the enemy made a deep impression, and it would almost appear as though the death of the Prussian Prince, of whose talent and ardour high hopes were entertained, had caused a kind of panic at the Royal Headquarters.

It is a peculiar thing, this depression at headquarters. News of disaster arrives. Every one who hears of it is affected by the long, depressed faces of those who already know it, and all give themselves up to fears and are unable to decide about anything. The very best time for action is thus lost.

Great minds, of much experience in war, can, when at the head of an army, master such a state of mind by a single word, a single motion. When at Castiglione a general officer brought disastrous news in an excited manner to Napoleon, he tore the insignia of rank from his

shoulder. Blücher, when told that Napoleon was in his rear, used an expression of which he was particularly fond, but which I cannot put in writing. Sometimes a joke is made and calm thereby restored. Thus, in 1813, young Lieutenant von Gerlach, Müffling's adjutant, when he saw consternation at headquarters and inquired the cause, was told (it was during the flank march from Silesia to Wartenberg): "Napoleon is approaching." "What matters that?" said the young man, who was then as full of jest as he was in his old age, "Napoleon is a good sort of fellow, but rather stupid." Everybody laughed and began to consider what was best to be done.

But nothing of the kind happened at the headquarters at Blankenhayn on the 10th October. Höpfner hints at the disconcertion caused by the Prince's death. Many and various propositions were listened to, adopted and then rejected, while the troops remained under arms all night, and finally the return march to Weimar was ordered and begun early on the morning of the 11th. If it were intended to retire immediately on the first appearance of the superior force which compelled the advance guard to retire, then Höpfner is right in saying "that there was no sense in moving forward to Hochdorf." As it was, it kept the troops in motion for thirty-six hours without seeing the enemy and without food, only to find themselves after all back again in the same place.

We learn from this, that indecision on the part of the Commander-in-Chief may quickly destroy the powers of the troops and render, in a short time, a whole army unfit for battle. And on the morning of the 11th October, after the night marches, the greater part of the allied army was in this condition.

Hence in war it is better to undertake something with firm determination, than to vacillate hither and thither. "Ordre, contreordre, desordre." Best is the enemy of good. In war, therefore, we should adhere to what is seen to be good enough, and not be led away by seek-



ing for something better. We also learn, that strategical plans must be made calmly and with reference to the object sought to be gained, without regard to the passions of anger, hatred, terror, foolhardiness, or fear.

Finally, we learn that it is of the utmost importance to be successful at the first encounter with the enemy, and so to arrange the movements of the troops as to have numerical superiority even at the first little engagement. For the news of a first success strengthens the confidence of the leaders in their troops and *vice versa*, and inspires the troops which have not participated in the engagement with an eagerness to win laurels too—while the news that the first conflict has been unsuccessful produces exactly the opposite effect. You know how quickly in every-day life rumours are spread and magnified, how much more quickly in an army in war, where the men are so close together. You were an eye-witness to the enlivening effect which the news of the success at Nachod produced on the troops next morning, and what the result of the assault on Weissenburg was.

11TH OCTOBER.—On this day the main army went into camp at Weimar, facing in the direction of Saalfeld, so that the chief portion of the enemy was already marching past the left wing. The troops of Rüchel and Blücher (the latter after a march of 29 miles only finished on the 12th October) reached cantonments in the vicinity of Weimar. Hohenlohe's army was to go into camp with the main army on the plateau of Jena. But these movements were interfered with by events, which proved how quickly the discipline of the best troops is loosened if they are demoralized by want of food, useless marches and counter-marches, and perceive indecision on the part of the Commander-in-Chief. In Jena a false alarm was given, runaway teams got tangled up and blocked the streets, the troops could not get to their camping places and passed the night in column of route, spending the time robbing each other or

plundering houses, for no rations were issued them. The supply trains approaching from Gera heard the alarm, and turned off to the north, thus failing once more to reach the army.

In the main army too, an evil spirit was abroad, and manifested itself in overt acts (Höpfner, p. 310).

It is not always possible to prevent the troops suffering privations by good strategical arrangements. For at a time when forced marches are required, it may be impossible to distribute regular rations. If the hunger of the troops does not reach such a degree as it did at Jena, they can stand it for a short time, if they only feel that the orders issued show that the commander knows what he is about. The efforts exacted from our troops before the battles of St. Privat and Sedan were enormous. Especially toward the end of August, 1870, when it was necessary to overtake MacMahon on his flank march, the men of the infantry succumbed in large numbers. But the determination which characterized every order issued imbued the troops with firmness too. No useless counter orders were issued, there was no room for distrust in the leader. The most difficult tasks were accomplished with a good heart. When we left the roads leading west and advanced north on the 17th of August, I heard the men laughingly say: "To-day the command is 'By army corps right wheel.'" And on the 25th of August, when another change of direction to the north was made, they called out: "By armies right wheel." The confidence of the army as to a successful issue equalled that which a devout Christian reposes in Providence. Thousands and thousands fell by the wayside. They were cheerily assisted by those whose strength had not given way. A man, totally worn out, would be left behind with a laugh, "He'll come on presently." Lying on the top of a pig-sty another called out: "I am living on the first floor, and got it cheap, too." The severe rains and thunderstorms were joked at.

The hardships of Napoleon's troops in October, 1806, were not one whit less than those of the Prussians. But when marches are made to and fro, instead of steadily onward, when orders are no sooner given than rescinded, when they turn out not to be prepared with proper care and are not in harmony with the arrangements made for subsisting the troops, then discontent and mistrust, added to the hardships and privations, loosen the discipline, increase the sufferings, and sap the *morale* of the army in ever-increasing degree.

The greatest evil, however, was that the Commander-in-Chief seems to have been in this uncertain state himself. He let anything happen and resigned himself to the result (Höpfner, p. 310). But this frame of mind is the worst a leader can have—it paralyzes all initiative.

Speaking of the days after the battle of Königgrätz, Austrian officers told me that Benedek at Olmütz used to mix with the young officers and soldiers and talk to them with cheering words and jests, and that no one could understand how he could joke after such a disaster. I must confess that I like him for it. The unfortunate commander showed that he at any rate possessed that strength of character which is requisite in the leader of an army.

12TH OCTOBER.—In the army of Prince Hohenlohe the whole day was spent in restoring order among the troops, who had been thrown into confusion by the panic of the day before, and in laying out the camp which had been assigned to them. The right wing was at Kappellendorf, the left wing on the Schnecke,<sup>1</sup> near Jena.

This day shows in a glaring light the difference between the mobility of the French army, and the slowness which the habits of the previous century had engrained in the Prussian army. Napoleon's troops marched nineteen to twenty-eight and a half miles, and still had time to find shelter or go in camp.

<sup>1</sup> The name of a steep road winding up from Jena through the hills to the plateau on the left bank of the Saale.

It took the Prussian troops a whole day to go in camp, which was always a lengthy operation, and not a soul thought of using the troops available to crush the relatively small forces which were rashly advancing on the left bank of the Saale and forcing back the Prussian outposts in despite of the fact that the entire army was forming up about four miles away. On the contrary! Every shot of the enemy's skirmishers, the mere sight of his patrols, caused excitement and apprehension in the Prussian army. The want of food made itself felt more and more.

The main army remained in camp on the 12th October. The troops of Rüchel and Blücher could make no further move on that day, for the march on the 11th had lasted far into the next day. Before making any further plan news of the enemy was awaited.

Thus were abandoned all the fruits of the political initiative which it was thought strategy would gather in, and the enemy was allowed to rule the situation because the cavalry (according to our present ideas) was not made proper use of and nothing was known of the French movements.

Finally, on the evening of the 12th trustworthy information confirmed the, until then, vague rumour that the enemy had entered Naumburg. It was then impossible to remain inactive any longer without being surrounded by the enemy, for Naumburg is north-east of Weimar and almost due north of Jena. The plan, which was then adopted, was correct. It is true that a General Werder would in this case, as he did at Villersexel, have attacked the enemy at Jena on the 13th, had he, as in the latter instance, had before him a Bourbaki with his clumsy masses of newly-formed regiments and "gardes mobiles." Napoleon, however, was not a Bourbaki and his army did not consist of "gardes mobiles," but of the best trained, war-tried and best organized troops in the world. Thus strategical plans are not only dependent upon the number

of troops and distances by road, but also upon the quality of the enemy's troops and their leaders.

However, an offensive stroke on the 13th in the direction of the Landgrafenberg would have brought the entire hostile army to a halt, as did Werder's offensive at Villersexel. We have already discussed how the mere view of Hohenlohe's troops caused Napoleon to concentrate his whole army in that direction, because he mistook these troops for the united forces of the allies.

In view of Napoleon's great superiority, an offensive stroke on the 13th in the direction of Jena and beyond, even if undertaken with the entire force, could not have given any lasting result. A disastrous reverse was probable as soon as Napoleon brought up his reserves, and his wings turned the flanks of the Prussian army. Hence the dispositions, as made, were correct.

The main army was directed on Kösen to close this pass and prepare for the retreat over the Unstrut. The army of Prince Hohenlohe was to remain at Jena on the left bank of the Saale as rearguard, Rüchel to advance to Weimar.

But the method of conducting business at the Royal Headquarters prevented the timely execution of plans quickly made and which required prompt action in order to yield favourable results. Höpfner describes the routine (p. 332), and I need not repeat it to you here.

It is characteristic that a desire for consultation was again seen. Instead of sending them short and positive orders, Rüchel and Massenbach were ordered to Weimar "to communicate with them about the requisite arrangements," and the generals of the main army were called together, one of whom, as I have already stated, had to wait for his morning sweat. Not only were eight precious hours thus lost, but Massenbach's presence was especially fatal.

We see from all this of how much importance a quick and precise transaction of business is in strategy. The

mechanical work of the staff is an essential element in strategy. Therefore Bronsart's work on the duties of the general staff is one of eminent value to the strategist.

13TH OCTOBER.—On this day certain incidents, which cannot be foreseen in war, again put the trumps into the hands of the Prussians. Lannes advanced rashly, in spite of Napoleon's warnings, beyond the Saale at Jena in the face of an army drawn up for battle. Tauentzien with his advanced troops retired before him, and he then occupied the Landgrafenberg.

Prince Hohenlohe put his army in motion to throw back the enemy into the Saale and destroy all who had crossed the river. The army advanced jubilantly in line of battle, and being four times superior in number to the enemy, there could be no doubt as to the result. It was a little after twelve noon, and at this fateful moment Massenbach appeared and brought from headquarters a peremptory order for the Prince not to attack on that day.

I once read a narrative, which has never been published, written soon after these events by an officer belonging to the suite of the Prince. The author openly charges Colonel von Massenbach with making a false report, with collusion with the enemy and treason. He even hints that Massenbach did not come from Weimar at all, but directly from the enemy, and meant to save the latter by this false order. It is true Massenbach constantly indulged in fantastic dreams of intimate relations between Prussia and Napoleon, and was blinded by the results he expected. But the charge of treason is such a grave one that it would require more substantial proof before it could be preferred against an officer in such high position. The charge, however, falls to the ground, because Massenbach really had been at headquarters and thus could not have been with the enemy. It is probable that the author of the narrative wrote down these accusations when grieving over his country's misfortune,

because he could not otherwise understand why a victory which could have been so easily won, was wantonly thrown away.

Now that we have all the facts in black and white, we can more easily and correctly guess how this misunderstanding occurred. And this is of importance, in order to deduce lessons for the future from the study of the history of the war.

To me it is more than probable that Massenbach early on the 13th October (he had been ordered to headquarters by a letter of 4.30 a.m.) again briskly championed his favourite idea of a passage of the Saale and opposed the plan of retiring over the Ilm and Unstrut. He was then probably told in unmistakable terms that the army of Prince Hohenlohe was to act purely on the defensive on the banks of the Saale, covering the flank march of the main army from Weimar to Auerstädt, and closing the passage of the river at Jena and Dornburg, because it was not the intention to take the offensive on that day. With these positive orders Massenbach came to the Prince and found the whole army in motion to take the offensive. At that moment he did not see that this offensive movement was a defensive act in order to close the defile of Jena to the enemy, and impressed by the peremptory tone of his orders, he adhered to its literal meaning.

It is strange that Prince Hohenlohe and Massenbach, who, so far had made the most extensive use of the freedom with which a corps commander may modify plans according to circumstances, should obey an order to the letter at the very moment when it was proper to keep in view its sense, not its mere wording. Höpfner describes the Prince's anger, but he finally obeyed and stopped the attack. Lannes established himself firmly on the Landgrafenberg and in the places in front of it (Cospeda-Coswiger, Kiefern), and Napoleon was enabled to assemble there, in the evening and during the night, the greater part of his army for the blow on the 14th October.

We learn from this, that the commander of an army

must only carry out an order in the sense in which it is meant. The leader of every body of troops, however small, must in executing an order, consider what was known by the giver, and thus show a form of co-operation with the latter, which I would like to call the initiative of obedience. I once saw a very instructive instance of this kind in Kriegsspiel. A body of troops advanced from A towards an enemy at B. A detachment at C marched of its own account also on B by way of a place D which was on the road. After passing D the detachment was overtaken by an order sent early in the morning, to march on D. The detachment returned there, obeying the letter of the order, but acting against its true meaning, which could be nothing else but to advance against the enemy from C by way of D.

I once was an eye-witness to a similar case during the war, only in that instance it was fortunately not the letter, but the underlying idea of the order, that was kept in view. It was at the battle of St. Privat, and I shall refer to it later on.

It also appears from the events of October 13th, how much better it is to send written instructions to commanders of armies and army corps as to their duties, rather than to call in commanding generals and their chiefs of staff to consultation, not to speak of the loss of time caused by doing so. Had the Duke of Brunswick at 4.30 a.m. October 13th written to Prince Hohenlohe roughly as follows :

“The enemy has occupied Naumburg. The main army will move at once to occupy the defile of Kösen. The army of Prince Hohenlohe is to cover the march of the main army during the 13th, by preventing the enemy from crossing the Saale, especially at Jena and Dornburg. On the 14th October the main army is to continue the retreat beyond the Unstrut, and Prince Hohenlohe's army is to follow to Auerstädt and Kösen as rearguard,”



this letter would not have required more time than the one ordering Massenbach to come to headquarters. The Prince and Massenbach would never have thought that they were prohibited from repulsing an enemy advancing upon them across the Saale. On the contrary, as an experienced leader the Prince was aware that it was impossible to remain purely on the defensive, and he would have known that it was part of his defensive task to throw Lannes back into the Saale on the 13th October. He would also have recognized the fact that the army could not retire without giving battle after Lannes had passed through Jena and occupied the Landgrafenberg. He said himself, that the commander opposed to him was Lannes, who was fond of a fight. Nor would it have entered his mind under such circumstances, to plan an offensive movement extending beyond the Saale.

Let us imagine what would have happened if Prince Hohenlohe had not been prevented at 12 o'clock from carrying out the attack already begun. He would, in all probability, have defeated Lannes completely and pushed back his corps into the river. And it is not impossible, that, later on, Augereau, coming up from Rudolstadt, would have shared the same fate, unless he halted at Cahla. Napoleon could not have prevented this, for he did not reach the Landgrafenberg until 4 p.m. on the 13th, and was alone. By that time everything would probably have been over, and the army corps following behind would have found the defiles of the Saale blocked by the retreating masses of Lannes' corps. It may well be asked, if, under these circumstances, Napoleon would have directed Davout's and Bernadotte's corps on Apolda, or whether he would not have preferred to unite his army on the 14th on the right bank of the Saale, to await the offensive of Prince Hohenlohe's army which he mistook for the united Prussian forces.

The engagement on the 13th October would not have had decisive results, because it would only have struck

a small part of the French army. But at any rate, it would have been a success which would have raised the *morale* of the troops, and balanced the mishap of Saalfeld. It would have had about the same effect as that of Gross-Görschen, checking Napoleon's advance, compelling him to follow more cautiously and slowly, and gaining time for the Prussian army to unite and retire to a position offering a safe line of retreat.

This supposition, however, requires that the main army should have occupied the pass of Kösen on the 13th, and continued its retreat over the Unstrut on the 14th October. Prince Hohenlohe, drawing Rüchel to him, might have followed the retiring army on the same day as rear-guard, veiling his movement by means of cavalry on the plateau of Vierzehn Heiligen, as Höpfner proposes (pp. 346 and 347). For after discovering that Hohenlohe's corps was retiring, Napoleon would have had to defile over the Saale on the 14th in order to pursue, and would hardly have been able to overtake it on that day.

If Napoleon had ventured, after Lannes' defeat, to direct the marshals Davout and Bernadotte the next day on Apolda, the main army would have had an opportunity of defeating the parts of these corps which had crossed the river on the 14th, in the same way as Hohenlohe's army would have defeated Marshal Lannes on the 13th. Moreover, the main army might have closed the defiles of Camburg and Kösen on the 13th, for which it would have had ample time, if it marched early on that date, as the distance from Weimar to Kösen is hardly 19 miles. In place of all this, a double catastrophe happened to the Prussian army.

As I have already stated, it is not surprising that Hohenlohe was defeated on the 14th October in view of the overwhelming superiority of the French troops and their organization and tactics. At Auerstädt the main army came upon the heads of Marshal Davout's columns, in the act of debouching from and in time to throw them

back into the defile of Kösen, for the main army had an overwhelming superiority over the enemy, especially at the beginning of the battle. The Duke of Brunswick was just on the point of turning his advantage to account when he was struck down. This put an end to the unity of command in the Prussian army, and the battle was given up as lost without putting all available troops into the fight. We learn from this that in addition to strategical wisdom another element is required in war to gain victory, and that is "luck."

Frederick the Great often said: "This man has no luck. I have no use for him."

## FIFTH LETTER.

### LESSONS TO BE DEDUCED.

LET us review the events which led to the catastrophe of October 14th, and sum up the lessons in strategy to be deduced from them :

The superiority of the French over the Prussian army in numbers, tactics and organization was such that now, when we know everything about both sides, we may say that the Prusso-Saxon army had from the beginning very little prospect of success. But there was no reason why such a complete disintegration of the army should have taken place. The circumstances were such that the army might, after being successful in a few engagements, have retired in good order before the superior forces of the enemy, until reinforced by the Russians, when a totally different result might have been obtained. The following strategical factors contributed greatly to the magnitude of the result.

1. *On the part of the Prussians, national policy did not act harmoniously with strategy.* Politicians had decided on war from the 9th August. The mobilization of all the forces did not follow immediately. Nor were they put in motion as early and quickly as possible. There was hesitation and loss of time, of so much time indeed that the start of six weeks gained politically was entirely lost. For Napoleon did not become convinced that Prussia would risk a war until after the middle of September.

Before the war really commenced, the advantage gained by the national policy was surrendered to the

opponent, the opportunity for taking the offensive was lost and the enemy permitted to dominate the situation.

On the part of the French we see policy and strategy coming from the same powerful source and co-operating harmoniously. At first Napoleon mistook the intentions of the adversary. But as soon as he saw that war was unavoidable, he did not spend a day more than necessary for the concentration and the strategical deployment of the army and the preparations necessary before entering upon the struggle, while at the same time giving assurances of his desire for peace. You may say that he gave his army, which had been resting for more than six months in its quarters in Bavaria, two days' rest to prepare for the exertions it must undergo. That is true. But it took the army ten days to assemble and he granted two days' rest only after this. I am inclined to believe that he would not have granted even this amount had he not been waiting for the Guards coming from Paris, thus insuring numerical superiority.

2. *The Prussian army was at first so posted as to cover the entire frontier from the sea to Paderborn, Eisenach, the Thuringian Forest and the Austrian frontier.*

*Napoleon marched forward in a close mass, at first in the direction of Berlin and Dresden, only because he did not know exactly where to look for the main body of the enemy, but with the firm resolve to assail it as soon as found. When he thought he had it before him, he gave the necessary orders to insure the co-operation of all his troops for this purpose.*

3. *On the part of the Prussians no effort was made to unite all the forces for the main battle. Ten or twelve thousand men were detached for subordinate purposes, which might have been accomplished by small cavalry patrols. (Höpfner, p. 223.)*

The whole of the troops were not mobilized, some were kept back in the eastern provinces and a whole corps under the Duke of Württemberg was kept in rear as a

strategical reserve—a matter to which I have not yet called your attention. The idea of a strategical reserve, kept back in order not to risk everything on one battle and retain an intact nucleus for an emergency around which to rally the débris of the defeated troops, reorganize them and put them in condition for renewed action, is a natural one, and, at first sight, plausible. Höpfner has sufficiently demonstrated its unsoundness. He who cannot overcome the enemy with all his available forces, will certainly be beaten if he only use a portion of them. After defeat a small fraction of the army cannot retrieve misfortune and must succumb, like the Duke at Halle, when confronted by the entire hostile army.

*The French Emperor united all the forces he could get together into one body.* He marched so, that he could unite his whole army in one day for a blow, if the leading corps were pushed back upon the centre, and in two days if the deployment took place to the front; everything else was disregarded, nor did he allow himself to be disturbed by the Prussian scouting parties on his lines of communications. For he knew that if he were successful in a decisive battle, all these must disappear like chaff before the wind.<sup>1</sup>

4. *The Prussian leaders were hampered by the antiquated strategy of the previous century*, tied down by old methods of warfare which consumed much time and retarded the movements of the army, but from which Napoleon had freed himself.

*He recognized no system or rules of strategy beyond operating with a view to victory.* He did not even have a plan of operations. He himself said: “Je n’ai jamais eu un plan d’opération.” He marched forward, leading his troops so that he could attack the enemy with his whole force wherever he might meet him.

<sup>1</sup> The same thing occurred in 1813. Napoleon feared no demonstrations round his right flank, provided he could meet and beat the enemy in his front.—ED.

The Prussian leaders *changed their plans* several times, and at important periods of the operations, not because the enemy or the events compelled them to do so, but because a new opinion prevailed. This occurred at Blankenhayn, on the night of the 10th October; again with Hohenlohe's corps on the 11th and 13th October. Fatiguing marches and countermarches, crossings of columns and the ensuing disorder occurred, and thus time and the opportunity for favourable action was lost.

*Napoleon was always ready and never undecided.* His arrangements, definite and appropriate, were carried out with consistency, and thus impressed on his troops an active and eager spirit. Judged by the present standard of strategy, he made mistakes, for which he probably blamed himself, but which were not observed because not taken advantage of by the enemy. Among them we may count (conscious, as we are, of our own wisdom !):

(1) *The exposed march of the left column on the left bank of the Saale.*

(2) *Dispositions made in the absence of information about the enemy.*

(3) *The hazardous advance between the hostile army, and a neutral state, thereby exposing his line of retreat.*

But he carried out his ideas with consistency and ceaseless activity. The rapidity of his movements took his opponents' breath away, and prevented them thinking for one moment that he could make a mistake. This so fascinated them that the mistakes he did make were not taken advantage of. He preferred the good and did not lose time seeking for the best.

We see that the Prussians violated every one of the five axioms which in my first letter to you I enumerated as the prime requisites of sound strategy; that Napoleon, on the contrary, observed them.

I fancy I can hear you reprove me, and charge me with contradicting myself. You will say that it was not my purpose to criticize, or to censure. I must therefore



vindicate myself from this accusation. He who begins to criticize desires, above all, to learn. Hence it is impossible to deduce lessons from the events without criticizing to a certain extent. But I am not at all of the opinion that I should have done better as a leader than the Prussian generals of 1806 if I had been trained in the then Prussian school. On the contrary. It is only from the experiences of this and many other campaigns of the century in which we live, that the axioms enumerated in my first letter have been deduced. The axioms are :

(1) *That national policy must go hand in hand with strategy.*

(2) *That the hostile army is the first object of strategy.*

(3) *That one can never be too strong for a decisive battle.*

(4) *That one may not follow a fixed system, but must always rely on sound judgment.*

(5) *That to change strategical plans when not forced to by circumstances leads to disaster, because the best is the enemy of the good.*

Only for the purpose of proving the correctness of these axioms did I show how their non-observance in 1806 led to disaster. Napoleon was our first teacher of modern strategy. His pupils, whom he taught on the sanguinary field of battle, finally used his teachings against him and thus overcame him. Clausewitz was the first to clothe these lessons in a garment of scientific colour. The youngest disciples of Napoleon, the supreme commanders of our army in 1866 and 1870-71, have surpassed their master. For it is my opinion that they set about their strategy in a more objective, confident, and deliberate manner than that of Napoleon.

The events from the 8th to the 14th October teach something else too, which I cannot help pointing out to you.

*In spite of the superiority of the French in numbers, tactics, and warlike training, the Prussian army had opportunities on the 11th and 13th October for gaining quite considerable*



*successes.* They would not have led at once to a general victory, but they might, as stated above, have arrested the enemy's operations and placed him in an unpleasant position. They might have gained time for the Prussian army to effect an orderly retreat. While retiring it might have united with the reserve army of the Duke of Württemberg and thus have been in such a state to demand respect. Who can tell whether there would not then have occurred what happened in 1813, i.e. a staving off of the decision, a change to the better by the timely arrival of Russian aid, and a change in the Austrian policy? This shows *that the stronger is not always absolutely sure of success in war.*

Blume has pointed out five questions in strategy which a state is to ask itself and answer before going to war. To these five questions, viz. *the resources of the enemy, his mental capacity, his opinion of our strength and capacity, the probable force he would put in the field, and what we have available against him*, I would like to add a sixth, viz. *the rapidity with which both parties can assemble their forces at the decisive point.*

But the answers of the strategist to all these questions can only express a probable, never a certain result. The unforeseen incidents of war often give the chances of victory to the weaker one, and this is shown by the 11th and 13th October, 1806. This was the case also in the war of 1796, when the answers to these questions would have been unfavourable to the French troops starving in the Maritime Alps; yet Buonaparte was victorious. Again, in the campaign of 1814, in which Napoleon nearly succeeded in pushing the allies back beyond the Rhine in spite of their crushing superiority, and in which he might have had peace on favourable terms had he been a little less pretentious in the negotiations of Chatillon. And lastly, it is also shown by our latest wars. Have you forgotten how, before the war of 1866, all the so-called wise men warned us against

it as being likely to lead to disaster on account of the enemy's superiority? And do you remember how, in 1870, many were of the opinion that we would lose the first battles against the veteran French army? Do you recollect how not a few entered the war with resignation, expecting heavy blows and a war "à l'outrance" before we should be able to drive the enemy out of our country, the invasion of which was deemed inevitable? Such was the opinion of men who had not that insight into the general situation which the supreme commanders of our army had.

From these considerations I draw the conclusion that we need not despair even if the answers to all these six questions are unfavourable. The decision as to whether war should be made cannot depend entirely on the answers to them. There is something beyond the calm calculations of strategy, that urges the people or the state to take so momentous a resolve as the declaration of war, with all the suffering, sacrifices and horrors it entails. But if the honour and all that is held most sacred by the country, demand war, then these strategical considerations become of secondary importance. *Strategy, therefore, must consider itself as entirely dependent upon and subservient to the national policy.* It was so in many of the instances above cited, and also in 1806. In such cases we must trust to those "unforeseen incidents of war," to the righteousness of our cause and to what is commonly called luck; or, as I prefer to call it with Höpfner, *Providence guiding the destinies of mankind.*

I draw the further conclusion that, in such grave times, *strategists must not hamper a monarch in coming to a decision by expressing their opinions, thus encroaching on the domain of national policy,* as did Massenbach and many others in 1806. Then everyone must confine himself to his own duties and perform them faithfully, trusting that the government will also do its duty. Meddling and

uncalled-for advisers only waste the time of those they advise, and cause trouble and indecision as in 1806.

But when the whole country supports the government, as in 1870, then unity gives strength and compels success even in the face of the enemy's apparent superiority.

END OF THE FIRST PART.

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## Part II.

THE CAMPAIGN FROM THE 29TH APRIL TO THE 4TH  
JUNE, 1859.

(See Plan No. 2.)

### SIXTH LETTER.

THE POLITICO-STRATEGICAL SITUATION ON EITHER SIDE.

ANTICIPATING your consent I will make the development of the war of 1859 in Italy, up to the first decisive battle, the next subject of our strategical discussions. This war took place in modern times. It is of great interest and furnishes a still larger number of general lessons, because in this instance, in direct opposition to what occurred in the wars of the first Napoleon, there was no mighty genius superior to all opponents, overthrowing everything by his physical and moral power and chaining victory to his standards. The leaders opposed to each other were men of moderate ability. Hence it is all the more interesting to investigate, what led on the one side to victory, on the other to disaster. Here you will find ample confirmation for your frequent assertion, that the victor is he who makes fewest mistakes. This campaign can also be followed with ease from the very best sources of information. For with a frankness which cannot be sufficiently praised, the vanquished side has described the course of the campaign strictly in accordance with facts. The work on this war by the Austrian Headquarters Staff

(Vienna, 1872) consults all sources, gives all facts, causes, effects and motives, admits all errors, palliates nothing and anticipates adverse criticism on the part of outsiders by expressing the hardest, severest and most unsparing criticism upon the Austrian operations.

It is for this reason that, after studying this work, I did not think many other authorities necessary, especially as the Austrian work quotes the statements of the French account, and uses them without contradicting them on any material points. If you have read the work, you will certainly agree with me.

No doubt, the political complications which led to the war of 1859 are still fresh in your memory. For I recollect with what great interest we both followed the events. Still I shall briefly recapitulate the facts, to consider, with their help, the mutual influence of national policy and strategy.

In the year 1857 revolutionary movements had taken place all over Italy brought about by the emissaries of Mazzini. Piedmont secretly encouraged them with a view to gain with their assistance the supremacy over the whole country. The English government had shown itself not unfriendly toward these aspirations. But the French government and police had actively co-operated in thwarting the enterprises set on foot against Naples ("Mémoires du Comte de Vieil Castel," part 4). The Italian conspirators therefore resolved on the death of Napoleon. Orsini attempted the Emperor's life in January, 1858, and the will he left behind him seems to have made a powerful impression upon Napoleon. It looks as though he adopted the advice given in it, to secure his life and throne by giving assistance to the revolutionary movements in Italy.

In the second half of 1858 signs of a hostile disposition of the French government towards the position of the Austrians in Italy were evident. (Austrian Official Account, p. 1.)

The Austrian government also received trustworthy information that the disaffected inhabitants of the Italian districts under its rule, were encouraged by Piedmont. There was a sultry feeling in the political atmosphere, and this was aggravated by the strained relations between France and England (see "*Mémoires du Comte de Vieil Castel*," part 4).

This sultriness preceding the tempest was lit up by a flash of lightning. On the first of January, on the occasion of the new year's congratulations, Napoleon said to the Austrian ambassador: "I regret that our relations to your government are not as good as they used to be, but please tell your Emperor, that my personal feelings towards him have not changed."

The world knew Napoleon's custom of announcing his politics in advance by some public expression. Though he lost thereby the advantages of political surprise, yet it seems he considered this mode of action necessary, because he did not feel sure of having a firm hold on the minds of the French. He felt his way cautiously and thus always prepared public opinion and excited the passions, without the assistance of which he could not hope for success.

No one, therefore, who in those days read the words of Napoleon, was in doubt as to his resolution to make war against Austria. An intelligent lady of high social position told me at once: "There is no doubt now, he is following the advice of Orsini's will. And the Austrian official account also states: "These few words gave the impression of a threat, almost a declaration of war."

It was to be expected that Austria would now either accede to all the demands of Napoleon, or, if convinced that a conflict was unavoidable, would spare no effort to gain the lead in the preparations for war with all the resulting advantages. The former could only be done by ceding the Lombardo-Venetian kingdom, which, if accomplished

without battle, would undermine the honour of Austria and her position as a great power. War then was the only remedy left. Napoleon had forced the sword into the hand of his opponent.

One would have expected now that Austria, being fully aware of the situation (according to the official account), would have mobilized her whole army at once. But the political leaders did not comply with these demands of strategy. The government neither yielded, nor did it push preparations with energy. For four months but half measures were taken, preparations were made in driblets and the most precious time was thus lost. I shall refer to this adverse criticism later on to demonstrate its correctness. I mention it to defend myself against the obvious charge of engaging in criticism contrary to my intention, of simply learning from the events. The half measures of the Austrian policy impressed their stamp on the whole conduct of the war. The fact also that the military leaders never took but half measures, is conspicuous like a red thread throughout the entire history of the war, and we learn from this how great is the influence of the spirit, which permeates the national policy, upon strategy. It is but natural. A general who knows that his government is determined to risk the existence of the country if necessary, is more apt and ready for enterprise and heavy blows, than the one who feels that his government is adverse to decisive action.

Before I justify further what I am saying, permit me to compare the forces of the opponents, as they stood on January 1st, 1859. For from that date when it became known that war was unavoidable, none but military considerations should have prevailed, both as to war and policy.

According to the law on organization, the strength of the Austrian army on a peace footing was to be 334,263 men, 63,539 horses and 552 guns; and on a war footing 674,033 men, 108,228 horses and 1504 guns. This

organization had not been sufficiently long in existence to allow of an increase of the army in case of mobilization by the requisite number of trained troops, nor had the normal peace strength been reached. The latter was still short by 25,000 men and 13,700 horses, and the war strength of the army lacked 55,058 men, and 55,677 horses. The official account, however, states that the number of recruits due in the ensuing spring, and volunteers, covered the deficiency in men. Thus we may put the strength of the Austrian army at the beginning of 1858, at 674,000 men, 50,000 horses and 1504 field guns. The peace strength of the French army was 390,812 men and 77,227 horses; the war strength 610,435 men and 152,427 horses, with 209 field batteries of six guns each, or 1254 guns.

The peace strength of the Sardinian army was 49,273 men, 6290 horses and 80 field guns; the war strength 86,806 men, 15,358 horses and 160 field guns, of which, however, but 82,497 men, 15,358 horses and 160 guns were available for field service.

We may put the strength of the French and Sardinian armies together at 692,932 men, 167,785 horses and 1414 guns.

The two hostile armies were therefore about equal in numbers.

The naval forces of the two opposing powers we may omit entirely in this campaign. It is sufficient to state, that the united fleets of France and Sardinia were so much superior to that of Austria, that the French were safe from any interference on the part of the Austrian fleet, with the transport of the troops from the coast of France to that of Liguria and Tuscany.

But the real relative strength of the two powers is totally different from the numerical strength.

The former compared with the latter is essentially modified by a comparison of the peace and war strengths. The peace strength of the French army was nearly



400,000 men, the war strength a little over 600,000. The Austrian army had to be more than doubled upon mobilization. The French army could therefore be mobilized with greater ease and rapidity than the Austrian army, the term of service in peace was longer, and the men therefore better trained.

On the other hand the Austrian army could be assembled more quickly at the decisive point of the theatre of war. It had at its disposal two lines of railroad as far as Verona (of which one was somewhat interrupted). France was limited to the transport by sea, for which there was available but one line of railroad in France, and when landed at Genoa, but one line to Turin, of doubtful utility. In addition she might march her troops over the Alps by the Mont Cenis road. But this line of communication was not of much use in winter, and as late as May the troops met with enormous difficulties on it owing to frost and snow.

Now if the advantage of the French, due to the superior organization of their army, seems to be more than counterbalanced by the fact that Austria could appear on the decisive theatre of war with considerable forces and greater rapidity, especially if operations began in the winter when the Alps were impassable, the gain in strength becomes still more favourable to Austria, if we consider what forces the allies had to employ elsewhere.

Sardinia, of course, could and would use all her troops for the decisive struggle. But France could not denude Algeria entirely of troops. Owing to her strained relations with England, she could not expose her coast to irruptions of small parties. And Napoleon knew very well, that the non-Austrian parts of Germany could never become allies of France in this war.

When, therefore, France had assembled 107,656 men and 9008 horses on the theatre of war by 20th May, and when altogether 200,000 men were sent there during the

war, it was certainly the utmost France could do, considering how many must be deducted from the war strength of 600,000 men for reserves, garrisons, care of the sick and to protect the line of communication.

On the other hand there were no political reasons why Austria should keep back any large portion of her troops from the seat of the struggle. She had nothing to fear from the rest of Germany. On account of the position taken by Austria in the Crimean war, her relations with Russia were not friendly. But since an attempt, to bring France and Russia into more intimate relations, had failed in Stuttgart in 1857, she had no reason to fear actual hostilities from Russia, when fighting the latter's late enemy. England, it is true, had aided the intrigues of Cavour and the efforts of the revolutionary party of Italy. But owing to the strained relations between France and England, it was more probable that the latter would assist Austria, or, at least, observe a friendly neutrality, than that she would become her enemy.

We have yet to consider the parts of Italy not belonging to Sardinia. Here Austria had to protect friendly states and anticipate revolutionary movements. This she would do best by crushing and destroying the Sardinian forces. If the Austrian army accomplished this in a short time, revolutionary movements would cease. But Austria had to protect her coast on the Adriatic against enterprises by sea. For this two army corps sufficed, which must be deducted from the number available, in addition to the garrisons of Mainz and Rastatt in Germany, which Austria had to furnish under the requirements of the German Confederation.<sup>1</sup>

It is also a question whether Austria could then see things as plainly as we do now, since we possess official and

<sup>1</sup> The above paragraph is really funny. English sympathies were entirely with Italy. As to the so-called friendly states which Austria had to protect, they were honeycombed with revolution and hated the Tedesche to a man.—ED.

accurate information of the number of troops, the orders of battles, and organization of the armies. But the condition and strength of the French and Sardinian armies could have been ascertained without difficulty by any legation, and it is not to be supposed that the Austrians abstained from doing so. As to the political situation, the official account complains of the slowness of Prussia in meeting and adopting Austria's views. But it cannot be expected, that one state should precipitate itself into a war for another, strong enough to defend itself. From the 1st January, 1859, Austria was certain of at least the friendly neutrality of Prussia and the rest of Germany. Therefore she was sure, in any event, of being able to confine the war to Italian soil if she so desired.

Of Russia the official account states, that she showed unfriendliness to Austria in her diplomatic relations. But that it is a long way off from strategical acts. If hostilities were to be apprehended from Russia, it was certainly one more reason why the whole army should be prepared for action at once.

England was at first friendly towards Austria, but before the war broke out a change of cabinet altered this. But that England should take an active part against Austria, was not thought of by anybody, even in Austria.

It has also been asserted, that financial reasons made the immediate mobilization of the whole army undesirable. Partial mobilizations, which lead to defeat because furnishing insufficient forces, are still more costly.

Lastly we find that the army required ten weeks for its mobilization, a lengthy time according to modern ideas (Official Account, p. 62) and a good reason for beginning it early.

It therefore seems to me unquestionable (it is easy to say so now that the events have spoken for themselves) that Austria should have ordered the mobilization of her whole army as soon as she was informed of the words

addressed by Napoleon to Baron Huebner. Ten weeks later, before the middle of March, the whole army might then have been on a war footing.

In the meantime such troops (infantry) as required less time to mobilise, might have been sent to the theatre of war, and, allowing another half month for the transport of the rest of the troops, the Ticino might have been crossed at the end of March with 300,000 men. It is hardly to be presumed that France, which by the 20th May had assembled on Italian soil little more than 100,000 men, would, by the end of March, have assembled a force in Italy sufficient to save the Sardinian army from destruction. To avoid the odium of the preparations during the ensuing negotiations up to the time of action, it was only necessary, not to call it "mobilisation," but nevertheless to order it to take place without delay. In the meantime diplomatic negotiations might have been carried on and Austria might have asserted with full sincerity, that she preferred peace to war, while there was no need to give expression to her conviction that France was resolved on war.

Do you believe that the insurrection in Tuscany would have taken place at all if, at the end of March, 300,000 Austrians had crossed the Ticino? Do you believe it possible, in the face of such a force in Lombardy, to have gone on with the formation of Garibaldi's volunteer forces so that at the decisive moment they could appear as a weighty factor and as though risen out of the ground.

I will not indulge in further speculations as to what might have happened if such energetic measures had been taken from the beginning. What has been said is sufficient for my purpose of pointing out the lack of harmony between policy and strategy, and to show the causes of the mistakes made so that we may profit by them.

To be perfectly just in my criticism and not to draw

wrong conclusions, there remains one question to be answered: "Could Austria, after Napoleon's New Year's address, be sure that war could no longer be avoided?"

I think not only that she might have been sure of it, but that she *was* sure of it. The Official Account (p. 114) states that it was known that military preparations on a large scale were being made in France as early as December, 1858. But the opinion prevailing in the higher circles of Vienna as to the situation, is most plainly expressed by the demonstrative and noisy transfer of the 3rd Army Corps to Italy, in answer to Napoleon's address.

This insignificant strategical measure was not at all in keeping with the gravity of the political situation. There were transported—for this corps was on a peace footing—altogether 10,000 or 12,000 men from Vienna to Cremona, Lodi, Milan, Brescia, Bergamo and Crema. The transfer began on the 7th January and the infantry brigades reached their destinations between January 10th and 16th (p. 64). Such a small addition to the troops stationed in Italy, did not constitute a great increase of force, but it made much noise, not only because the troops were dispatched from Vienna, but also because the Austrian diplomatists made as much fuss as possible about this transfer. I happened to be in Rome just then, and recall distinctly how they puffed up this transfer of troops into an act of heroism, and boasted that Austria meant to show that her determination was firm and that she was prepared for the worst.<sup>1</sup>

If instead the battalions in Italy had been raised to their war strength by mobilisation, more than six times as much infantry would have been sent to these three corps and less noise would have been made about it.

Was it, perhaps, the intention of Austria's politics to

<sup>1</sup> Of a piece with the British Government sending the Guards to Malta before the Crimean War.—ED.

make as much noise as possible, scare the opponent and thus avoid war? One might feel inclined to think so, if it could be believed possible that such illusions should have been entertained at Vienna. But if, as the official account rightly says, Napoleon's New Year's address gave the impression that a declaration of war was intended, then the military measures ostentatiously made and much noised about, constituted an acceptance of the gauntlet thrown down by Napoleon. We may, therefore, consider the war as beginning with the transfer of these troops, both parties delaying a formal declaration of war only, in order to make it at the time most suitable for their strategical arrangements. As it was, the reinforcement of the Austrian troops on the Ticino gave a welcome pretext to Sardinia for hurrying on her own preparations, and France also could prepare openly without bringing upon herself the odium of appearing a disturber of the peace in the eyes of Europe. For she could not desert her friend, with whom she had in the meantime become more closely connected by family ties.

I ask both you and myself, what considerations may have caused these half-measures and delays on the part of the Austrian authorities, when the gravity of the situation was so apparent?

Lack of funds I cannot accept as a point deserving any weight whatever with a state the head of which pronounced the lofty words: "Did Austria ever have money, when she began a great war?" Nor can I presume that we two are wiser than the statesmen of Austria in 1859. Anyone who met Count Buol, would acknowledge him to be a wise and shrewd diplomatist, familiar with the affairs of Europe.

I am unable to explain the measures taken by Austria from January to April, 1859, otherwise than by the lustre which Napoleon had known how to add to his name during the sixth decade of the century and which was then dazzling all Europe and—you cannot deny it—us

also. Up to this moment he had carried out all he undertook with such deliberate coolness, that everywhere he gained the ascendancy, all states acknowledged the superiority of France and were loath to quarrel with her. Even if it now became clear to Austria, that the sword must be appealed to, it may have been an unpleasant discovery. The Austrians seem to have hesitated between the recognition of the fact that war was unavoidable, and the hope of getting round it in some way. As a patient hesitates to submit to an operation and prefers to try palliatives, until the evil has increased so much that it is too late to be operated on, so probably in Austria mobilisation was delayed and negotiations tried until too late. This is too much in accord with human nature not to be possible, and as I can find no other explanation, I believe it to have been the case.

We learn from this how, in politics and in strategy alike, the name of a single man may have a bad and disconcerting effect upon the adversary. What a paralyzing influence a name may exercise upon the enemy in tactics, we know from the history of the first Napoleon. His opponents nearly always became cautious and uneasy the moment they heard of his presence. While in Austria, I was told that the Archduke Charles, in 1809, when observing the preparations for the passage of the Danube made by Napoleon before the battle of Aspern, spoke to his chief of the staff, Colonel Count Wimpffen, condemning the temerity of the Emperor in undertaking such a task in the face of an army in position; yet, it is said, it was the Prince's intention at first to retire. His chief staff officer then asked him what he would do if it were Jourdan who commanded on the other side, and being answered that he would attack and throw him into the Danube, proposed that he should suppose Jourdan to be in command. Then only, it is said, the Archduke resolved on the battle, in which he defeated Napoleon.

Please pardon this little digression in the way of an anecdote, which I could not resist relating.

Thus from the beginning of January to the end of April, Austrian politics vacillated between measures bent on war and others counting on peace. In the same way the first strategical measure, the mobilisation, was carried out piecemeal, and the unfortunate strategist, to whom was confided the command in Italy, remained uncertain as to what his task really was. At one time the Austrians counted upon an active and offensive co-operation on the part of Germany, so that offensive operations would have to be postponed until the allies were ready. In this case it was intended to bring about a decision by operations from the direction of the Rhine, and if the Franco-Sardinian adversary took the offensive first, Austria was to remain on the defensive in Italy. At another time they believed it unsafe to wait, because the advantages of action and anticipation to be obtained in Italy would be lost.

Thus Count Gyulai remained in uncertainty whether the defensive or offensive had to be taken; naturally, as a result of the experience of 1848, he was much inclined to utilize the defensive power of the historical Quadrilateral. Its strength had been the favourite topic of all Austrian strategists for the past ten years; again and again it had been pointed out, that there Austrian power was invincible. Four years before this war, while staying at Radetzky's headquarters, I never heard anything discussed but a defensive position within the Quadrilateral after abandoning Lombardy, and of occasional offensive strokes from it should the enemy offer an opportunity. It is dangerous to become so imbued with an idea as never to think of any other contingency. Napoleon the First said once: "Italy belongs to him who possesses the plateau of Rivoli." On the strength of this casual remark Charles Albert, in 1848, marched to Rivoli; Radetzky allowed him to get there undisturbed, attacked him in flank



and defeated him. What is correct to-day, may be wrong to-morrow under a different state of policy, strategy and relative strength. Strategical measures must be based on reason in the first place, to lead to success, for it is the foundation of all strategy. Adherence to a dead system leads to disaster. Policy and strategy which do not lead to victory are wrong, however much they may be in accordance with all previous theories; they appear to me like the medical skill of the physician whose patient dies, but who insists that from a scientific point of view he has acted correctly, and who disdains to save the patient by remedies which from the state of his knowledge appear wrong.

The Official Account gives us the many and long-winded papers sent by Gyulai to Vienna. They plainly show his bias for a defensive within the Quadrilateral.

As late as the 25th April he reports, "that the rapid approach of the French forces had compelled him to choose the defensive." On the 1st May, he received in answer a telegram, which arrived mutilated and must have led him totally astray. The real despatch read thus: "Under present circumstances the theatre of war in Italy is the first consideration. In a fortnight another army corps on a war footing will start from here for Italy."

Gyulai received the following instead: "Under present circumstances the theatre of war in Italy is chiefly about Verona. Another army corps on a war footing will start from here daily for Italy."

Such a misunderstanding caused by telegrams is very instructive. We know of similar instances. In 1866 Gablenz got into mischief through such a telegram. He had ordered a brigade from the rear to Prausnitz near Kaile. But it was directed to Prausnitz on the Elbe, and the Prussian Guard Corps found the mouth of the defile of Eipel open towards Kaile, and was enabled to attack Gablenz in rear. I can tell you from my own experience, how the interchange of a single letter in a telegram relating

to very important matters might have had the most disastrous consequences. The telegram read: "*heute nicht*," (not to-day), but was telegraphed "*heute nacht*," (to-night). Just the opposite. In the latter case any disastrous consequences were averted by timely reconnaissance. For this reason it was ordered in the war of 1870-71 that written copies of all telegrams were to be sent in addition, a precaution on which too much stress cannot be laid. Leaders of armies should not be made to depend upon the telegraph wire except in cases of extreme necessity. Their operations cover an extensive field, and must be made for several days ahead, so that they cannot be changed in a moment. It is therefore better to indicate to them their general line of action for some time ahead, by written or oral instructions, and to leave details to their discretion.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is a good custom, and one which was made use of in the Franco-German War, for the recipient to send back the telegram along the wires. If this be correctly done, there can be no doubt it has been correctly received.—ED.

## SEVENTH LETTER.

### THE PREPARATIONS ON BOTH SIDES.

YOU are not entirely wrong in censuring me for indulging too much in political considerations in my last letter. But I could not confine myself within narrower limits without failing entirely to show the dependence of strategy upon politics. To-day I will only occupy myself with the forces placed at the disposal of the opposing leaders, and mention policy in so far only as it has anything to do with the question.

Summarized, the politico-strategical preparations for war on the part of Austria were as follows :

Upon the New Year's address of Napoleon an army corps (the 3rd) on a peace footing (10—12,000 strong), was sent to Italy. This transfer was completed by the middle of January. There were now in Italy four army corps (the 3rd, 5th, 7th and 8th), all on a peace footing.

Sardinia began to assemble troops on the frontier of Lombardy. France made preparations and bought horses. At the end of January, Napoleon proposed a congress to solve the "Italian question." Austria declined this proposal on the 6th February, and the Sardinian Government was voted a credit of fifty million Lire, i.e., it effected a loan for war purposes.

In spite of this no further reinforcements were, for the present, sent from Austria to Italy. The four "*Grenzen*"<sup>1</sup> battalions of the 3rd corps alone were on a war footing, and the batteries of the army in Italy were put on a war

<sup>1</sup> The frontier battalions, which had a special organization.—ED.

footing by giving them the horses of other corps; the latter were to replace them by purchase, a measure which permanently impaired the efficiency of all the rest of the artillery.

On the 14th February, Gyulai reported that for an offensive toward the West there were only twelve brigades with a total strength of 25,742 men available (p. 72), if he left behind the necessary garrisons. (He was already speaking of a retreat within the Quadrilateral). To take the offensive against Piedmont alone and crush it, he demanded five mobile army corps. But with this force he believed himself still unable to cope with the united Franco-Sardinian army, unless he kept within the Quadrilateral. To take the offensive, in his opinion, required seven army corps (p. 82).

During February there were constant disturbances and demonstrations in Parma, Modena, Tuscany, and even in Lombardy, under the very eyes of the Austrian troops.

It was only on the 25th and 28th February, that orders were given to augment to war strength all the troops belonging to the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 7th and 8th Army Corps. Nearly two months had been lost, although the time necessary for mobilising the artillery in Italy (ten weeks) had been somewhat abbreviated by the previous augmentation of horses.

On the 10th March orders were issued for organizing the necessary trains.

In the meantime Austria was trying to gain the co-operation of the other German states, but not with sufficient energy. For as late as the 5th February, Count Buol wrote to them, that there were but slight indications of impending war (p. 5). No wonder that in February the Cabinet at Berlin expressed itself to the effect, that as yet it could not see any necessity for introducing certain preliminary measures in the Diet <sup>1</sup> (p. 8).

<sup>1</sup> The assembly in which the representatives of the different German States met.—ED.

On the 1st March, Count Cavour stated officially that the independence of Italy and the exclusion of Austria from the country was the *conditio sine quâ non* of an acceptable solution of the international dispute. Yet France stated that she was never more confident of the preservation of peace than at that moment, and denied all preparations of war on her part as late as the 5th March.

England tried to intercede, but Lord Cowley's mission failed at the beginning of March.

On the 26th of March the available Austrian forces only numbered 103,000 men, which it was thought could be raised in time to 162,000 men by augmenting them to war strength.

The whole of March passed under assurances of peace, and proposals for an international congress, in which Russia participated. At the end of the month Austria assumed a more decided tone, and demanded that Sardinia should disarm before any further negotiations or congress could take place (p. 13).

Although this political step precluded any peaceful settlement, yet the mobilization of the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 7th and 8th, and afterwards of the 6th and 9th Corps, was not ordered until the 5th and 6th April. The five first-named corps were then in the course of being augmented to war strength, but the last two still required ten weeks to make them complete and ready for war. In the meantime Count Gyulai had been informed from Vienna on the 29th March, that the 2nd Corps was ready to be sent to Italy; but its transfer only took place between April 13th and 28th.

So far England had been on the side of Austria in the negotiations. But then occurred a change of the British Cabinet and British policy. On the 3rd April England supported Napoleon's proposals.

Although it had been known in Vienna for some time that war was unavoidable, yet it seems that only now was

it definitely acknowledged, and the mobilization of seven army corps ordered, which was the number demanded by Gyulai (Official Account, pp. 15 and 96).

Soon afterwards Napoleon coquetted with the non-Austrian states of Germany by means of articles published in the *Moniteur*, and made what seemed to be concessions, by agreeing to a general disarmament, having only just before denied any such preparations on the part of France. But he only went so far in his concessions, because he knew that Austria would not accede to them.

On the 19th April Count Cavour also agreed to the proposal for a general disarmament. But both France and Sardinia nevertheless continued diligently to push on their armaments.

Austria in the meantime sought to gain the assistance of Prussia and the other German states by sending the Archduke Charles to Berlin, and Prussia directed her delegate in the Diet to make a motion on the 23rd April to place the contingents of the Confederation on a war footing. She hoped in this manner to prevent war breaking out.

But already on the 20th April, probably upon the movements of French troops to Italy being known, the Austrian Government had directed Count Gyulai to send an ultimatum to Sardinia, which after being detained three days by England's intervention, was delivered on the 23rd April. Three days were given for an answer. A negative answer was returned, and on the 27th April, Gyulai received telegraphic orders to cross the frontier.

On the 24th April the 9th Corps (not yet fully ready for the field) was ordered to Italy.

On the 25th April French troops entered Savoy and the neutral territory of Geneva, and on the 26th April the first French soldiers were landed in the port of Genoa.

What information may have caused Count Gyulai to report on April 25th that "on account of the rapid

advance of the French forces " he had decided upon the defensive, does not appear from the Official Account.

The army with which Gyulai entered upon the campaign consisted (see appendix 5, part 1 of the Official Account) of the field army, viz., 5 corps, 1 infantry and 1 cavalry division, numbering 144,703 men and 20,285 horses, of which 106,631 men and 6068 horses with 364 guns were combatants; of Urban's Reserve Division, which was to crush risings in Lombardy, and consisted of 14,386 men, 1308 horses, of which 11,573 men, 700 horses with 20 guns were combatants.

*Special troops*—1624 men, 148 horses, of which 1449 men were combatants.

*Garrison troops*—66,845 men, 1693 horses, of which 30,959 men, 247 horses with 16 guns were combatants.

Total:—227,558 men, 23,434 horses, of which 150,612 men were combatants; besides 7015 horses with 400 guns.

The official report of the strength of the individual battalions shows that most of them had not yet reached their war strength, i.e., that their mobilisation was as yet incomplete. This was especially the case in the 2nd and 3rd Army Corps, i.e., in those battalions which, being sent forward before they were ready for the field, had been interrupted in their mobilisation.

In comparing these figures with those which (according to the note, p. 81) the troops in Italy on the 6th April would have reached, had their mobilisation been properly completed, we find that in that case 176,559 men, 34,313 horses with 448 guns, of which 118,526 men and 6875 horses were combatants, would then have been available for offensive operations.

Hence a regular mobilisation of the four army corps present in Italy on the 6th April would have given a larger army available for the offensive than the one which, on May 1st, consisted of five corps and which crossed the Ticino. All this shows that half-measures in politics

and the consequent hesitation in strategy, delaying or precipitating preparations, cause not only loss of time, but of power also.

I am almost inclined to believe, that Blume had in view these first four months of the year 1859 when he wrote on the subject of war and diplomacy.<sup>1</sup> For the diplomatic negotiations did not go hand-in-hand with the military preparations in such a way, that the rupture took place at the moment most favourable for commencing war. Premature, or rather insufficient, military measures rendered nugatory the advantages derived from skilful diplomatic negotiations both in the middle of January as well as at the end of April. Without essentially increasing the strength of the forces they gave, in the middle of January, to the adversary a desired pretext for carrying on his preparations openly. At the end of April they deprived the country of the powerful allies, with whom it had just been agreed that they should be given time for their own preparations.

It may be difficult for a government to keep calm in the face of continuous and groundless provocations such as were then offered by the French and Sardinians. But rational strategy should not allow itself to be carried away by impatience, indignation should not be shown, until the strategical deployment is completed. The same error of politico-strategical impatience led France in 1870 to declare war and begin hostilities before the mobilisation and strategical deployment were completed, and brought about a similar result to that which happened to the Austrians in 1859.

<sup>1</sup> The passage referred to runs as follows :—"If it has been determined to go to war, or if it seem probable that the conflict of interests can only be solved by war, the diplomatic negotiations and the military preparations should go on together so that the outbreak of hostilities may take place at a favourable moment for military action. By wise diplomacy time can be gained for the mobilisation which, combined with a well-timed commencement of hostilities, will considerably increase the probability of military success."—ED.



Let us now, by the aid of the Official Account, investigate the preparations of Austria's adversaries. This work, it is true, does not go into such details about these, as about the Austrian preparations. It gives, however, sufficient figures and dates to judge the progress of the preparations from the results.

The Sardinian Government had, previous to New Year's Day, 1859, made no real preparations for war. Up to that date there had only been secret agitations in Tuscany and Lombardy, to prepare for revolt and the formation of volunteer troops.

It was only after the 3rd Austrian Army Corps had been sent to Italy, that a cabinet meeting was held in Turin on the 17th January, at which it was decided to prepare for war. The steps taken related chiefly to the fortifications to be thrown up under the direction of the French Marshal Niel, the augmentation of the army to a war footing, and the procuring of the necessary materials, arms, clothing, etc.

According to the Official Account the army does not seem to have been in that state of preparation which one would expect, considering the favourable relation between its peace and war footing. The necessary arms and field clothing, at any rate, were not available. Only the reserve contingents of two years were called out by the end of January to augment the army, and those on furlough not until the end of February. The raising of a war loan about the middle of February has already been alluded to.

Sardinia had every reason to hasten her preparations as much as possible, because her country would be the first to be affected by the war. Yet when it broke out the preparations were still incomplete, not to mention the fortifications, which being earthworks thrown up in winter, crumpled to pieces in the spring. The order of battle of the 20th May shows the number of combatants available for the field to have been only 55,648 infantry, 3984

cavalry and 90 guns, in round numbers 60,000 men, among them 3120 Alpine riflemen (volunteers). But according to the mobilisation plan, the war strength of the field army should have amounted to 82,197 men, 15,358 horses and 160 field guns. Hence the army fell short of its war strength by 22,000 men and 70 field guns.

It cannot be said that the strategical preparations of the French army were pushed with the energy of the First Napoleon. Before the Emperor uttered those words which on the 1st January placed the ball of fortune upon the inclined plane, none but naval preparations had been made in France. The great Napoleon would have given the most peaceful assurances up to the moment when he was ready to fire the first shot. You may perhaps think on that account, that the Third Napoleon did not mean to give his words that far-reaching meaning which was generally attributed to them. I cannot believe that, but think that on New Year's day he already intended to risk the chances of war with Austria. But even supposing that he spoke thus merely to throw out a feeler at home and abroad, and bring out the opinion of the public of France and Europe, yet by the middle of January it could not fail to see that his speech would bring on war. Nor did it. The family ties entered into in Turin in the middle of January, the council of war held there in the presence of the Imperial Prince with regard to the preparations for war, and above all the fact that a French marshal was charged with superintending the fortifications in Piedmont, are facts so patent, that there can be no question as to his resolve to enter on the conflict.

How can it be explained that an army with a war strength of over 600,000 men, of which nearly two thirds were with the colours in time of peace—how can it be explained, we may ask, that after four full months' notice it could place upon the theatre of war only 107,656 men and 9008 horses? (see Official Account, appendix 7). I must honestly confess my inability to give

a satisfactory answer to this question. Even if fully 50,000 men had to remain in Algiers—a figure which seems rather high—even if the German frontier could not be denuded of troops owing to the unfavourable situation prevailing there, and for which 300,000 men were retained, there yet remained over 200,000 men that might have been sent to Italy. And the troops, which in the course of the war were sent there little by little, did reach this figure. Why were they not sent at once? It only remains to suppose, either that the pregnant words of Napoleon the First, “*activité, vitesse*” had been forgotten in Paris, or that the readiness of the army, in which the world believed on the strength of the published figures of the peace and war strengths, existed only on paper. The latter supposition is rendered the more probable by the expression “*archiprêt*” used by the war minister Le Boeuf in 1870 and which turned out to be so wide from the truth. Possibly both these reasons had a retarding effect.

The Austrian Official Account (p. 21) says, “that Cavour’s sudden yielding on the 19th April was in all probability intended only to gain time, especially for France, *her preparations being still far from complete.*”

Indeed the measures adopted for completing the preparations in France, which are mentioned in the Austrian Official Account, do not indicate great energy or activity. Six military trains per day going south are very few, considering that in 1870 we were able to dispatch 18 trains daily on each railway.

On the 10th April orders were issued for the transport of 50—60,000 men by rail and ship from France to Piedmont, and the concentration of 25,000 men on the Savoyan frontier was openly announced. As this involved the use of railroads partly under foreign control it was impossible to avoid it being known abroad. And yet the above figures in a war against a great power indicate but half-measures.

I believe that the Emperor himself at this stage only

recognized the fact that his army was not so ready as he had supposed, because about the same time he showed in the negotiations greater readiness to yield, evidently in order to gain more time for the strategical deployment of his army. For he must have known that a peaceful settlement was out of the question when once the forces were in motion.

The first French troops entered Savoy on the 25th April, and the first battalion of infantry was disembarked at Genoa on the 26th, as I have already stated.

Thus the endeavour to make the political rupture take place at the moment most favourable for military action was almost entirely lacking on the part of the Austrians, and seems also to have been adopted incompletely, or too late, by the French, to form a precedent for such a politico-strategical measure.

## EIGHTH LETTER.

### THE OPERATIONS OF THE AUSTRIAN ARMY UP TO MAY 6TH.

*(30th April to May 6th.)*

#### THE ADVANCE INTO THE LOMELLINA UP TO MAY 2ND.

THE Austrian ultimatum is dated the 19th April, but was not delivered until the afternoon of the 23rd, having been withheld upon representations made by England. It gave the Sardinian Government a respite of three days, which the latter of course utilized. On the 26th a refusal to comply with its conditions was returned, and the next day telegraphic orders came from Vienna to cross the frontier. On the 30th April the army crossed the Ticino.

The delays partake so much of the nature of indecision, that it is not necessary to criticize them. Where quick action alone can give a favourable beginning to a war, it has been customary, when sending an ultimatum, to grant but a few hours' time. In the meantime the dispositions for the advance have been made so that at a word operations may begin. Thus in 1864 at the crossing of the Eider the words "Forward in the name of God" were the signal. Similarly in 1849 Radetzky crossed the Ticino and began the war the day after the ultimatum was sent.

In this case the ultimatum of April 19th might have been delivered on the 20th and the Ticino crossed on the 21st.

·Nine days were thus lost. In strategy a single day may change the whole situation.<sup>1</sup>

In this case the delay up to April 27th was not, but that from the 27th to the 30th was, the fault of the commander of the army. No reasons are given why the passage of the river was effected on the 30th instead of on the 28th. We can only suppose that the cause of this delay was the aversion of the Commander-in-Chief to taking the offensive as ordered, under the existing circumstances, and that therefore he consumed the 28th and 29th April in marching to the Ticino, instead of having his army assembled there beforehand.

The army, consisting of five army corps (2nd, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 8th), a cavalry division and an artillery reserve, advanced on a broad front, and marched on the 30th April from the Ticino to the Terdoppio, an average distance of 9½ miles; on the 1st May from the Terdoppio to the Agogna, about 7 miles; on the 2nd May from the Agogna to the line of the Sesia and Po, 9½ miles. No enemy was met. Only beyond the Po some inconsiderable movements of troops, including artillery, were observed. A few ineffective shots were exchanged. The inhabitants of the district, called the Lomellina, willingly provided subsistence for the troops.

On the evening of May 2nd the troops stood as follows, beginning from the left :—

The 8th Corps at Pieve del Cairo on the Po, one brigade having been left behind to observe the Po farther down.

The 3rd Corps at Torre Beretti on the Po.

The 5th Corps at Cozzo and Candia (headquarters at Cozzo) opposite the junction of the Sesia with the Po.

The 7th Corps at Robbio and Rosasco, extending north as far as Vercelli, scouting beyond the Sesia and holding the points of crossing.

<sup>1</sup> The work of the Prussian General Staff on the war of 1859 contains a similar remark in the introduction.

The 2nd Corps moved to Mede ready to support either the 8th or 3rd Corps.

The Artillery Reserve and Cavalry Division moved to Ottobiano and Trumello,  $9\frac{1}{2}$  and  $14\frac{1}{4}$  miles respectively behind the front.

The extent of front was about 29 miles.

The 3rd Corps received orders to reconnoitre the bridge of Valenza on the evening of May 2nd, and at daybreak of the 3rd to take the bridge-head on the north bank, blow up the bridge and to destroy the works and the road thence to Torre Beretti.

This measure as well as the holding back of a brigade to observe the Po below the 8th Corps, indicates an intention on the part of the Commander-in-Chief to remain here purely on the defensive and advance beyond the Sesia against Turin.

Two things in the details of these arrangements have particularly attracted my attention :

In the first place the orders are of formidable length and detail. They give to the several corps directions as to things, which it is the duty of the latter to arrange without specific orders. Conciseness in orders is of the utmost importance in strategy. For to ensure that an order may be properly carried out, the first thing necessary is that it should be intelligently conceived and despatched in time. It should then be studied attentively and transmitted to the subordinates of those who first receive it, accompanied by the necessary orders on points of detail. If too long orders are issued by the supreme command, they are usually not finished sufficiently early by the clerks and thus reach the corps late, when everybody is tired out. Then it may happen, for we are all human, that the salient points of such detailed orders are not at once properly noticed and appreciated, or are overlooked altogether. Moreover, being often despatched late they may possibly not reach the troops concerned until long after the latter should have moved. We have not

had much experience of the consequences of such proceedings. Long ago General von Reyher taught our staff a concise and definite style for instructions and orders. Field Marshal Count von Moltke was a master of it. How disastrous the consequences of too detailed a style may become, is shown by the battle of Austerlitz. I need not remind you that the writing of Wairotter's dispositions for the Austro-Russian army had not been completed when the battle began. It is only by the tendency for lengthy documents which prevailed for a long time with the Austrian staff, that I can explain why in almost all wars the Austrian troops appear so slow in movement. Having spent nearly two years with them, I know that this is not really the fault of the troops.

No instructions at all are better than such lengthy ones. Blücher triumphed in the battle of the Katzbach, and on the evening of the battle he said to Gneisenau in his quarters: "Now sit down and write the thing called an instruction so that scientific men may believe that we really have won a battle."

The other point in the arrangements for the advance which has attracted my attention, is the mode of subsisting the troops. Requisitions were only allowed to be levied by the brigade commissaries, under the direction of the corps commissaries, and issues were to be made by the latter in regular order. But in war, rations cannot always be issued in time, if the system of requisitions is centralized in the hands of the corps authorities, because the number of men drawing rations is too great and only a small fraction can receive their rations in time. The consequence is, that the troops either go hungry or help themselves and commit criminal excesses. As a rule both of these things happen. Draconic orders on the part of Gyulai prevented excesses. Therefore I am not surprised at the complaints I have heard from many Austrian officers. In the midst of one of the richest districts of Europe, in the Lomellina, the inhabitants of



which were not unfriendly according to the official account, many troops suffered from privations which later on were increased by the frequent counter-orders and changes of plans on the part of the higher leaders.

I fancy I hear you objecting. You will probably tell me, that troops cannot be allowed to take what they find, because it is very apt to degenerate into pillage, which, besides undermining the reputation of an army, consumes the means of subsistence too rapidly owing to waste, and destroys discipline. No one can be more opposed to such disorders than I am. But there is a great difference between pillage and a regulated self-help on the part of the troops by means of requisitions for which receipts are given or still better for cash, for the latter method wins the sympathies of the inhabitants.

You may, perhaps, think that requisitions should always be levied under the direction of the commissariat department. That is a great error, into which many a commander has fallen. In that case he charges the commissary with the subsistence of the troops and rests contented with the measures taken by him.

The commissariat department is always too late with the supplies in time of war, unless it is assisted by the troops procuring some part of what is required under the superintendence of their leaders. This is no stricture on it. It is the fault of its organization and the influence of the business methods acquired in times of peace. It was the fault of the organization of the Austrian corps, inasmuch as while they had commissariat officers the divisions had none so far as I know. The prompt issue of rations to the entire corps is impossible, if it is to be made at one central point for all the troops of the corps, especially when the latter has marched on the same day. Even with us, where every division has supply officers, it cannot be done unless the troops are bivouacked close together. But when they are in cantonments and a division thus covers a space

nearly five miles square, how can they be fed, if at the end of the march they have to procure their provisions from some central point? The greater the number of troops, the more time will be required for the issue of rations. Those who have seen the confusion which arises on such occasions from the coming and going of provision wagons, will say that I am right.

The peace practice of the supply department is also apt to result in its arrangements not being sufficiently prompt in war. In time of peace every grain of oats must be duly accounted for and everything arranged as cheaply as possible and with the least hardship to the population. For manœuvres of eight days' duration the commissariat begins its preparations two months beforehand. Accustomed by long practice to peace routine, the commissariat officer likes to make arrangements far ahead, which however turn out wholly unpractical, because they are bound to go wrong in war the moment the least unforeseen incident happens. Some provisions also cannot be procured a long time in advance. In 1866 we found accumulated in Pardubitz large quantities of Austrian bread, which was to subsist the whole army for ten days. In what sort of state would the last loaves have been when issued to the unfortunate troops for whom they were provided!

An adequate food supply for man and beast is the groundwork of strategy. When visiting Marshal Radetzky's headquarters at Verona in 1855, that amiable old gentleman told me: "If ever you hold a high command, remember, a good soldier must have a full stomach! see therefore that your men have sufficient food. A hungry soldier has no courage."

There have been troops which have proved honourable exceptions to this rule and which have fought bravely although starving. Still Radetzky's words must be accepted as generally true. And what can you expect of horses that are not properly fed? General von Ledebur

says in his memoirs (published by Dunker in Berlin, 1855) that in the battle of Auerstädt, a brave cavalryman, decorated with the cross for bravery, fell behind. Charged with cowardice he silently pointed to his horse. It was unable to move one step. He fell into the hands of the enemy. What was the principal factor in defeating Napoleon's strategy in 1812? Want of provisions!

I hear you say, "This is all very well, but how can you arrange for the troops to subsist themselves without plundering?"

When charged with the subsistence of the Reserve Artillery of the Guard Corps in 1866 I made my arrangements with a lively remembrance of old Radetzky's words.

The very zealous commissariat officer proposed arrangements which would invariably have caused the troops to receive their rations two days too late. I took the matter in hand myself and so arranged it that none of the troops suffered from want of provisions, although after the battle of Königgrätz I marched through districts passed through by the retreating Austrian army with two Prussian corps marching ahead of me, and which were therefore pretty well drained.

In 1870 the Guard Corps did the same thing. (Whether other troops did so too, in 1866, I do not know.) Never except on the day of the battle of St. Privat did any part of it want for food.

In order to describe in a few words the system followed, I will give a special meaning to two well-known words and call "requisition" what the troops gather themselves, and "supplies" what the commissariat furnishes them without regard to whether the latter are obtained by requisition or furnished by contractors.

The troops should supply their daily requirements by requisitions, reporting the result each day. At the opening of the campaign they should also receive rations for three days' requirement, to be replaced as they are consumed,

like the reserve rations. The daily reports enable the commissariat officer to know how much he has to supply to the troops, and for this he always has three days' time. This does not prevent him from getting supplies from the country, through the higher civil officials, while requisitions by the troops are in the first instance to be addressed to the magistrates of the towns, and only in cases of extreme necessity to individual inhabitants.

To prevent excesses and maintain discipline, officers alone may make requisitions and they must give receipts or pay cash. Any requisition originating from any other military person, is in violation of orders and must be punished.

The following only are authorized to make requisitions, viz.:—the battalion of infantry, the regiment of cavalry, the brigade division of artillery. Smaller bodies may levy requisitions only when detached, and so situated, that they cannot receive their provisions for that day from the unit to which they belong.

The amount required varies. For a fine, fat ox is sufficient for one day for a brigade division of artillery, or a regiment of cavalry, two will supply a battalion. If the cattle are in poor condition double the number will be required. When therefore a single company, or squadron, or a battery kills an ox, there is waste of material, because they do not need so much meat.

The units referred to have each a paymaster, who keeps an account of everything due to the troops and of what they receive by requisition and regular supply.

It is not judicious to supply bread. The bread issued is usually too old, often green with mould, and causes dysentery and typhus fever. It is better to supply flour and let the bakers of each unit bake bread in the ovens found in the village. For an emergency when bread cannot be thus procured, the supply columns carry biscuit, which keeps longer. Wood and water, the troops get wherever they can find it.

To avoid disputes between different units, the country should be divided into zones for the purposes of requisition, in the orders issued with respect to their cantoning or bivouacking. Exceptionally, however, in the latter case, because then the troops must usually depend on their reserve rations or receive supplies from the commissariat.

The Austrian Commander-in-Chief was a strict disciplinarian. But if (as I have been told) he forbade, under the penalty imposed for illicit requisitioning, to cut down for fuel some mulberry trees standing by the roadside where the troops were bivouacking, he went too far, and to the detriment of his own troops, in his desire for military order and his wish to spare the country. For it is impossible to supply to troops in bivouac the large amount of fuel they require daily, in addition to their other needs.

By his high sense of order he reminds me of one of our veterans for whom I have the highest respect. After the events of March, 1848, he said that, if it came to another conflict in Berlin, he would have the town pillaged. "You a man of order, want to pillage? You are joking!" was the reply. "Upon my honour, I would," said he, "that is, my dear fellow, do not misunderstand me, for each company a cask of wine, carefully and prudently distributed."

The Commissariat Department cannot know how things stand in every unit, what hardships and privations are imposed upon them by the arrangements for their subsistence and how they may be avoided. The troop-leader only can judge this correctly, since he has risen from that body and knows what is going on in it. For this reason the officers commanding troops must interfere and apply the proper remedy for any unpractical arrangements on the part of the supply officers.

I have only spoken of meat and bread, because these two weigh heaviest. Other articles, such as vegetables (compressed), rice, salt, coffee, tobacco, are not so heavy

and can be supplied by the commissariat. Potatoes the troops must obtain by requisition. So must oats, which can rarely be brought up by contractors. To provide these in sufficient quantity is very difficult. In 1866 I required for the reserve artillery of the guard corps (including ammunition columns), 300 hundredweights of oats daily.

ATTEMPTS TO CROSS THE PO, FROM THE 3RD TO 6TH  
MAY.

3RD MAY.—The orders for this day (see p. 175, Off. Acct.) disappoint the expectation, raised by the defensive measures along the Po, that an immediate advance beyond the Sesia against Turin was intended. Nothing had as yet been seen of the enemy, and nothing had been heard of him, except imperfect information, of which that obtained in a diplomatic way and telegraphed from Vienna, was the most trustworthy. For suddenly the offensive was ordered; partly, it is true, a sham offensive, where just before a strict defensive, even the destruction of communications (blowing up a bridge, destroying the road), had been ordered.

Although the Official Account does not mention it, yet it would almost seem as though Gyulai had suddenly been ordered to attack the Sardinian army supposed to be assembled in the position of San Salvatore as quickly as possible, and crush it, before any considerable French reinforcements could arrive. Or Gyulai himself may perhaps have conceived this sudden change of plan.

It was intended that the 3rd Corps should storm the bridge at Valenza, and that the 2nd Corps should throw a bridge at Bassignana. The 8th Corps, in the meantime, was to make a feint at crossing at Cambio and Porto Cornale, and afterward follow the 2nd Corps over the Po. In the same way the 5th Corps was to make demonstrations along the Sesia and Po to alarm the enemy and then

follow the 3rd Corps over the bridge at Valenza. And finally the 7th Corps was to cross at the same point.

The following is what was actually carried out. These orders did not reach the 3rd Corps in time, which limited its efforts to destroying, not to using the bridge, and sent a despatch asking whether the bridge was to be taken possession of, or destroyed, and stating that on the previous day the passage might have been forced with little loss. The enemy had become alarmed and there was much cannonading; but the losses on both sides hardly deserve mention.

The 7th Corps forded the Sesia in several places and scouted for a mile on the further bank. Although no enemy was met, except a cavalry patrol, the troops had to recross the next day owing to a rapid rise of the river. A feint at crossing was also made on the Po and drew a considerable force of the enemy to the opposite bank; here, too, the hot fire maintained on both sides had hardly any effect.

The 8th Corps sent some troops across in boats to the island in the Po at the designated point, and then withdrew them without seeing anything of the enemy.

In the meantime the construction of a bridge over the Po at Vaccarizza below the mouth of the Sesia, had been ordered, with a bridge-head on the further side; the Gravellone was fortified at its junction with the Po. This was done in case of retreat by way of Pavia. (See p. 181, Off. Acct.).

The 2nd Corps reconnoitred the roads and assembled at Mede.

The 7th Corps had to remain on the Sesia, and reconnoitred from Vercelli forward, and in the mountains on the right.

The results of the demonstrations on this day were, that those made at the mouth of the Sesia and at Valenza really caused the enemy some uneasiness, and that information was obtained of the formation of volunteer

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corps in the mountains at Varallo and Crevacuore, thirty-three miles from the right flank.

While the orders for these movements were in transmission, Gyulai received news from Vienna, that 50,000 French had been ordered to Casale and Alessandria, that Bouat's division had reached Turin over the Mont Cenis, that MacMahon had left Genoa, and "that since Thursday 10,000 men were being forwarded daily from Toulon, 8000 from Marseilles, 7000 by way of Briançon."

On the evening of the 3rd May, Gyulai abandoned the plan of advancing by way of Bassignana.

The 3rd Corps was ordered to destroy the bridge at Valenza; the material offered unexpected resistance, a flood destroyed the mines and it could not be blown up until the 8th May.

All the movements of the army on the 3rd May may be called purposeless preparations for an offensive beyond the Po, which was never seriously contemplated.

On the 4th May, the 8th Corps was ordered to throw a bridge and cross the Po at Cornale, seven miles below Bassignana. The passage was successful, no enemy was seen, and the corps advanced about five miles to the south and threw out outposts.

The 2nd Corps was held in readiness at Sannazaro and Lomello, to support the 8th Corps if necessary. The 3rd remained opposite Valenza, the 5th Corps again made demonstrations at the mouth of the Sesia, and the 7th Corps, which received no orders whatever for that day, assembled one division at Vercelli, the other to the left on the Sesia.

For what purpose the 8th Corps crossed the Po, is not clear. Gyulai said in his orders, that he intended to abandon the line, Pavia-Lomello, and take up that of Milan-Vercelli, and that the 8th Corps was to cover the flank during the movement. One cannot but feel apprehensive for the safety of the 8th Corps on account of the dangerous position in which it would have been placed. I



suspect another movement which I will tell you later on.

The crossing of the 8th Corps caused great uneasiness to the enemy, lest the Austrian army should advance in this direction in force, and interpose between the forces of the allies. Most extensive preparations for defence were therefore made in the valley of the Scrivia.

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5TH MAY.—The dispositions for this day indeed contemplated, that with the exception of the 8th Corps, the army was to take up the line Milan-Vercelli. The 7th Corps was to assemble at Vercelli, the 5th at Robbio, the 3rd at Candia and Cozzo, the 2nd at Mortara and Cergnago. The Cavalry Division was to move to Nicorvo, the Artillery Reserve to Mortara.

But the rapid rising of the Po, already mentioned, prevented the blowing up of the bridge at Valenza, broke the one at Cornale, and left the 8th Corps in a dangerous position on the further bank of the Po, in the face of the enemy, with its retreat cut off. An advance on the part of the allies might have made this corps share the fate of Mortier on the Dürrenstein in 1805.

The orders for the other corps were therefore rescinded and they remained in their previous positions to be prepared for all eventualities.

In a telegram to Vienna, Gyulai called the movement, which had not been executed, "intended offensive movements" which he had been obliged to abandon. But if we follow on the map the dispositions sketched above, we find that a lateral movement of five to ten miles to the right was to be effected, but nothing offensive.

The Official Account states, that, excepting the rise of the Po, and its effect on the 8th Corps, nothing happened with the rest of the army. But I cannot believe that the new order, directing the movement to the right, arrived before they commenced their movements, as it was not sent out until six o'clock in the morning. To start a corps

requires some time, no matter whether it is to march five or fifteen miles. It is probable, therefore, that most of the troops were already on the march when they received the counter-order, and thus had to make fatiguing marches and counter marches. The 7th Corps sent scouting parties in several directions ten miles beyond the Sesia and found no enemy, but well disposed inhabitants, who voluntarily repaired the damaged roads. Reports received of the enemy were conflicting and, of Garibaldi especially, exaggerated.

6TH MAY.—The Po had so far subsided, that the restoration of the pontoon bridge became possible. It was completed by noon, and the 8th Corps recrossed by the bridge, taking until eleven o'clock at night, without being molested by the enemy, with the exception of a few shots exchanged with a hostile reconnoitring party of 500 to 800 men. The corps marched to Pieve del Cairo, Mezzanabigli and Sannazaro.

The 2nd Corps made way for it and marched to Cernago and San Giorgio, the cavalry division to Nicorvo, the artillery reserve to Mortara. Thus the troops of the second line carried out the lateral movement of five to ten miles to the right which had been intended for the 4th May, and the corps in the first line (the 3rd, 5th, and 7th) remained in their places. The 7th Corps put Vercelli in a state of defence.

The scouting parties pushed forward beyond the Sesia skirmished with Garibaldi's volunteers at Balzola, and on the canal at Popolo, and heard that the latter, supported by a Piedmontese division, had advanced northward from Casale. They were, however, only levying requisitions and subsequently returned to Casale. At Valenza the force of the enemy seemed to be diminishing.

## NINTH LETTER.

THE THREE WEEKS IN THE LOMELLINA, FROM MAY  
7TH TO 26TH.

You find fault with my last letter, because I discussed details only and failed to draw critical lessons from the operations as a whole.

I did it on purpose, for I want first to extract from the Official Account a summary of the strategical operations of the army up to the first decisive battle, thereby gaining a concise picture of the whole, and then we will investigate together the lessons afforded by a critical discussion of the campaign.

### THE ADVANCE TOWARD THE DORA BALTEA.

7TH MAY.—On this date the offensive operations planned against Turin, which had been intended for the 5th, at last began.

For this purpose the 7th Corps was to assemble at Vercelli (where it was already), scout toward Stroppiano, Desana and San Germano i.e. ten miles beyond the Sesia, send a strong half-brigade into the mountains to cover the right flank toward Biella, and fortify Vercelli.

This corps pushed its outposts in fact fourteen miles beyond the Sesia, by Cresana to Costanzana and Santhia, posted a brigade at Stroppiana and vicinity, one at San Germano and a half-brigade at Carisio on the right which patrolled as far as Biella without finding any revolutionaries. The other division of this corps remained at Vercelli.

The Cavalry Division moved to Vercelli, 11½ miles, and bivouacked.

The 5th Corps took up close cantonments at Rosasco. Palestro and vicinity (barely ten miles to the north, i.e. to the right) and was to cross the Sesia at Palestro next day. The 2nd Corps went into bivouac at Cozzo and vicinity 10 miles to the north.

The 8th Corps left two brigades at Lomello under General Lang, to watch the Po and send scouting parties beyond it towards Alessandria and Voghera; the rest of the corps moved to Mortara, about 10 miles to the north.

The 2nd Corps moved to Nicorvo, some 10 miles to the north-west.

The Artillery Reserve to Robbio, 7 miles to the front.

Generally speaking the army on this day rather made a movement to the right (north) than a forward one. Only one division of the 7th Corps pushing beyond the Sesia, spread itself in all directions, the advanced guards 14½ miles from the Sesia. The major part of the army was assembled on this river from Vercelli to its mouth. Five miles in rear the reserves stood at Mortara and Nicorvo.

Arrangements were made for the "impending rapid movements."

The information received of the enemy amounted to nothing. Only at Valenza, where the attempts to blow up the bridge were still unsuccessful, guns appeared on the further bank of the Po firing rifled projectiles, a sure indication that the artillery belonged to the French army.

8TH MAY.—The 7th Corps moved forward about 5 miles only, the head at Tronzano, the rear at Cassine di Strà, because the roads had been destroyed and had to be repaired to make a further advance possible. The right column occupied Biella, reached Ivrea on the Dora Baltea and proved the incorrectness of the information brought in by spies, as to the presence of 75,000 French at Biella, and large bodies of the enemy at Ivrea. For no enemy was found. Another scouting party alarmed the bridge head on the Po at Casale.

The 2nd Corps followed the 7th through Vercelli and took position to its left and rear.

The Cavalry Division remained in its bivouac at Vercelli.

The 5th Corps crossed the Sesia at Palestro on a pontoon bridge and its leading troops advanced to Stroppiano, Pertengo and Costanaza, about 5 miles beyond the Sesia.

The 3rd Corps marched to Torrione near Palestro, its head to Candia, i.e. 5 miles to the right without crossing the Sesia. One pier of the bridge at Valenza was blown up this morning.

The main body of the 8th Corps (leaving behind the two brigades referred to) moved from Mortara to Robbio, some seven miles, making a fatiguing march because it crossed the columns of the 2nd and 3rd Corps.

The Artillery Reserve marched to Borgo Vercelli.

Thus three corps crossed the Sesia on this day and their leading troops reached the Dora Baltea at Ivrea. Two corps, the cavalry division and artillery reserve remained behind the Sesia.

Lieutenant-Fieldmarshal Urban was directed to push a strong column to the south of the Po by way of Stradella without going too far from his base Pavia-Piacenza, so as to be ready to crush any risings in Lombardy with lightning-like rapidity.

One brigade of the 9th Corps was expected daily from the 10th May. The corps was ordered to Piacenza and the vicinity.

No enemy was met on this day.

I cannot pass to the events of the 9th May without again inviting your attention to the pernicious consequences of the crossing of marching columns, which may always be avoided by proper care on the part of the general staff, unless necessitated by unexpected events and movements of the enemy, as was the case with Napoleon in October, 1806. But on the 8th May, 1859, nothing

rendered it necessary. Yet the 8th Corps, which marched 7 miles, was in this way excessively fatigued.

Nor is it clear why on the 7th and 8th May so many troops were required to bivouac. They had to make but short marches and no enemy was near. Useless hardships impair the strength of the troops for no purpose.

9TH MAY.—On this day a small forward movement for the 5th and 7th Corps was ordered. The leading troops of these were to reach the Dorea Baltea and the Po below Ivrea. The 2nd Corps was to hold itself in readiness to support the movement, the rest of the troops were to halt behind the Sesia.

These movements had begun when, at 9.15 a.m., a counter order was received, and the army began to retire.

In obedience to these orders and counter-orders the following movements were made :

The 7th Corps formed for battle, then had to face about and retire to Vercelli. Both divisions bivouacked on the far side of the town.

The 5th Corps was advancing when, at 10.30 a.m., it received order to retire to Palestro under cover of a strong rear guard which was to protect the retreat of the division from Tricerro back to Vercelli.

At noon an hour and a half later, it received a third order to hold Tricerro and to leave a strong rear guard in front of Casale.

At 2.40 p.m it received a fourth order, directing it to halt on the line Prarolo—Pezzana beyond the Sesia.

Finally at 8.30 p.m. it received orders to cross the Sesia with part of the troops that evening. This order it was no longer able to execute.

The corps finally halted in the evening with one brigade at Stroppiano, one at Asigliano, one at Desana and the rest at Prarolo and Pezzana—west of the Sesia.

If the direction of an army corps is changed four times in a day, one would think that extraordinary news had

been received about the enemy. In fact, however, no important information had been received. The changes can therefore have been caused only by the fact that different opinions prevailed from time to time at headquarters. Anyone who has ever seen an army corps on the march in war and has ascertained how many arrangements must be made for it, can judge what confusion and hardship is imposed upon the troops by changing the destination of a corps while on the march. In this instance the 5th Corps must have been very much fatigued, the provision trains could not possibly have come up, and yet in the evening the corps stood on nearly the ground it had left in the morning!

The 2nd Corps was to retire at once over the Sesia, and take position between Torrione and Vercelli. It found the roads assigned to it occupied, and had to make a wide detour, going into bivouac at Robbio between 11 p.m. and 3 a.m.

The 3rd Corps was to move to Mortara through Castel d'Agogna, bivouacking astride the Mortara road and facing the Agogna. It had to march barely 7 miles, but although it started at 2.30 p.m., it did not reach its bivouac until 4 a.m. The roads were probably occupied by troops of the 8th Corps.

This corps which was to move from Robbio and its vicinity to Trumello, was so worn out by the fatiguing march of the previous day, which had not been completed until 4 a.m., that it was unable to reach its destination with all its troops. One brigade remained behind at Casoni di S. Albino owing to the exhausted condition of the men.

From the Official Account it appears that there must have been terrible confusion in the army on this day.

You ask, of course, what the cause of it was.

I have before me a detailed report of Gyulai to the Emperor, in which he attempts to justify the retreat. He cells his advance a reconnaissance toward the Dora Baltea,

and he retired because the enemy had abandoned that line. He intended to take up a central position in the Lomellina, from which he could throw himself upon the enemy wherever he may debouch. This report begins with the statement that His Majesty, the Emperor, had approved Gyulai's opinion expressed in his report of the 20th April, to the effect that the army was too weak for the offensive, and that a defensive, based upon the quadrilateral, must be taken up. An examination into the records on the part of the war office failed to disclose the fact that such approval had been given.

The 8th Corps received an additional order this day to send a brigade (Boér's) to Vacarizza (below the mouth of the Ticino), to occupy the bridge over the Po there and build a bridgehead. The brigade arrived there on the 11th May. The 9th Corps, a brigade of which was expected to arrive at Piacenza any day after the 10th May, was still delayed.

The information received of the enemy was vague and for the most part incorrect. Lang's scouting parties reported, that they had nowhere come upon the enemy, but that the arrival of the French Emperor was expected, and the allies were stated by the inhabitants to be assembling between Tortona and Alessandria. Outposts reported that they had observed the concentration of troops near Valenza. Farther down on the right bank of the Po no enemy was reported. News came from Vienna that up to the 6th May 40,000 French had been landed at Genoa, that 30,000 men of the 3rd Corps had reached Turin, and that two divisions of the 4th Corps and two of the Guards were approaching.

Gyulai's advance beyond the Sesia had caused much uneasiness to the allies. The French account states: "But on the 9th May the astounding news was received that the Austrian general was retiring by way of Vercelli."

10TH MAY.—The 8th Corps marched from Trumello



to Lomello,  $9\frac{1}{2}$  miles, and was ordered to resume its former task of observing the Po. One brigade (Lippert's) of the 2nd Corps was attached to it.

The 3rd Corps remained at Castel d'Agogna with one brigade on outpost duty along the Sesia.

The 2nd Corps moved to Albonese, 5 miles north of Mortara.

The 5th Corps was to retire over the Sesia partly by Vercelli, partly by Palestro, cook at the latter place and then march to Mortara to bivouac. Some portions of the corps did not arrive until 1 a.m. This march to the rear constituted for some of the troops a forced march of over 28 miles.

The bridge over the Sesia at Palestro was taken up.

The Cavalry Division marched from Vercelli to Nicorvo and bivouacked.

The 7th Corps retired over the Sesia and took position along the latter from Vercelli to Palestro.

Reports of pursuit by heavy masses of the enemy disturbed the march. On account of this Gyulai directed Vercelli to be abandoned if attacked by large forces (what was it fortified for?). But it turned out afterwards, that patrols only had been following the Austrians.

The Artillery Reserve went to Borgo Lavezzaro.

The movements of the day completed the retreat over the Sesia and the taking up of a central position at Mortara and the vicinity, six brigades being left on the Sesia from Vercelli to where it empties into the Po, and five brigades on the Po from the latter point to the mouth of the Ticino.

The siege park was sent to Mortara by Gyulai. This proves that he no longer thought of taking the offensive. (Yet the ammunition of the park arrived at Pavia a few days later!)

Practically no news was received of the enemy's movements.

THE DEFENSIVE POSITION IN THE LOMELLINA.

11TH MAY.—The army required rest after the hardships of the past four days. The Reserve Artillery alone marched northwards to Trecate. Boér's Brigade reached the bridge head of Vaccarizza. Nothing was learned of the enemy by the scouting parties south of the Po. Spies reported that in the districts of Voghera and Stradella shelter was being prepared for the allied army. This again seems to have made Gyulai uneasy for his left flank, for on the following day he telegraphed to Vienna that the enemy seemed to contemplate an offensive south of the Po against Piacenza.

The day was utilized to throw bridges to facilitate communication within the position of the army in the Lomellina.

12TH MAY.—No important marches were made, except that the Artillery Reserve was again ordered south, to Vigevano on the Ticino.

Only vague information was received of the enemy. Patrols pushed forward from Vercelli found the country between the Sesia and Dora Baltea, which had just been abandoned by the Austrians, swarming with the enemy's scouting parties and Garibaldi's volunteers, and General Gablenz, who was in command there, expressed his opinion that the enemy with the volunteers would soon go north through Gattinara and threaten Novara. Engagements took place in front of Vercelli with some of the enemy's leading troops.

As to the enemy's main army it was learned that Casale, poorly fortified with inferior earthworks, was held by a small force, and that the major part of the French army was marching on Tortona.

It would almost seem as though all the spies sent out by the Austrians had been in the enemy's pay; for the greater part of their reports were false. This is neither

the first nor will it be the last war in which such things have happened.

The Master-General-of-Ordnance announced to the corps in a general order the object of their various stations. He said that, too weak to attack the enemy in his fortified position, he should await him in the Lomellina and fight him in a pitched battle wherever he might dare to show himself.

At the same time the cantonments of the troops were ordered to be spread out for the sake of comfort.

13TH MAY.—The army moved to the following positions, which allowed at least part of the troops to be put under cover.

The 2nd Corps to Albonese and vicinity.

The 3rd Corps to Mortara and vicinity, one brigade on the lower Sesia.

The 5th Corps to Trumello and vicinity.

The 7th Corps to Robbio and vicinity, one brigade in Vercelli.

The 8th Corps to Lomello and vicinity, two brigades pushed forward to the Po, in addition to Boér's Brigade at Vaccarizza.

The Reserve Cavalry division at Vespolate.

The Artillery Reserve at Vigevano and Bereguardo.

There were thus placed on the circumference of the half-circle formed by the lines of the Sesia and Po from Vercelli to Vaccarizza, the 7th Corps, one brigade of the 3rd Corps and three brigades of the 8th Corps, total nine brigades. The rest of the army consisting of sixteen infantry brigades, the Reserve Cavalry and Reserve Artillery occupied a position in the centre of the semi-circle, from which they could reach any part of the circumference in one day's march, a forced one in some instances, provided there was good telegraphic communication, quick despatch of orders and immediate execution of the same. Only in case of concentrating on Vaccarizza would most of the troops require two

marches. But then the enemy also could not push unperceived any considerable force to that point in one day.

Of the enemy it was learned that considerable forces were assembled at Valenza and Bassignana, so that the villages on the opposite bank could not be occupied. It was also reported that the French Emperor had landed at Genoa and was expected at Alessandria on the 13th. A requisitioning party from Vercelli had a skirmish with some of Garibaldi's Alpine riflemen about a mile beyond the Sesia. Lastly Lieutenant-Fieldmarshal Urban reported that Garibaldi, whose forces were to number from 3000 to 12,000 men, had been directed to push into the Alps, to turn the right flank of the Imperial army and operate against the Austrian rear by way of Como and Bergamo. The port of Spezia had not been occupied by the enemy. Voghera and Tortona had been found unoccupied on the evening of the 11th.<sup>1</sup> For the moment it seems no attention was paid at Gyulai's headquarters to the threatening of his right flank. He continued to be uneasy for his left. For Urban was ordered to remain south of the Po until relieved by the 9th Corps, and not to advance with his main body farther than Casteggio, but to scout toward Tortona and the Scrivia, and the passes of the Apennines.

The 9th Corps reported that it could not arrive at Stradella before the 16th May, and that two of its brigades could not be relieved at Trieste before the 17th or 18th.

Urban was now ordered to return to Lombardy after the arrival of the 9th Corps, and detailed instructions were telegraphed to the 9th Corps, at Trieste as to how its troops would be employed later on by the Commander-in-Chief.

At this point I must call your attention to the uselessness of giving in advance detailed instructions as to what

<sup>1</sup> It is not clear, what caused Gyulai to report that the enemy's main forces were assembling between Alessandria and Tortona.

is to be done seven or eight days later. The vicissitudes of war are so manifold, that everything may change in that time. Hence such detailed dispositions for the future are but idle play of fancy; yet dangerous. For they uselessly absorb the energy of the staff, perplex the mind and always contain something unsuited to the situation later on.

Besides it is impossible thus to make dispositions for a corps from a distance. General information and instructions are necessary, but the execution of the details must be left to the corps commander.

The 1st and 11th Corps were now also ordered to Italy to reinforce the army there. Up to this time they had been intended as the Austrian contingent in the case of Germany's participation in the war. But the date of their arrival in Italy could not yet be stated with certainty, they being still in the act of mobilising.

14TH AND 15TH MAY.—On the 14th Urban moved with a brigade to Casteggio and Voghera, and his advanced troops found the defile of Pontecurone beyond Voghera held by the enemy. Next morning, when the advanced troops retired, the three last hussars were attacked by peasants and one of them killed by pitchforks. On the 15th May Urban returned with the brigade to Stradella.

A detachment (2 companies of *Zuiner Grenzer*) which had on the 11th advanced south into the Apennines to Bobbio returned to Piacenza on the 15th. It had taken Bobbio by surprise and started for Varzi, but found the Apennine passes in possession of peasants and partisans. These two reconnaissances undertaken for the protection of the Austrian left flank, made Marshal Baraguay d'Hilliers uneasy for his right flank. He therefore gave orders to have the passes of Torriglia and Varzi rendered impassable.

Whenever it happened in war that both parties were afraid of each other, my friend, General D., used to say:

"There! both were afraid of each other. In war it is only a question of being the least little bit less afraid than your opponent."

In Voghera it was learned that the Piedmontese Army comprised 100,000 men, 80,000 regular troops, the rest volunteers. That of the French only 20 or 25,000 men had reached Alessandria and Tortona from Genoa, the greater part having come through Turin and were now posted from Bosco to Alessandria and Casale. That the Emperor had arrived at Alessandria, and that a general attack on all the Austrian positions was imminent.

On the 15th May orders for the distribution of the corps in accordance with defensive ideas of Gyulai were issued from army headquarters. The official account only gives that part of them which concerns the 8th and 7th Corps. The instructions assume several cases and prescribe strictly what to do in each. In all of them there is much talk of retreat, even behind the Ticino. The case of an advance of the enemy against Stradella to the south of the Po is treated with special care. But the case which did happen, viz. the advance of the enemy with all his forces by way of Vercelli, was not taken into consideration at all.

Clausewitz, my instructor in staff duties, when criticizing a disposition worked out by one of the pupils and which began with the words "There are but three cases possible," said, "There are always only three cases possible, and when all three have been provided for, the fourth invariably happens."

You will perhaps charge me with inconsistency, because I am opposed to providing for all the different cases possible in giving instructions, although in my first letter I laid down the principle, that the strategist must consider all possible emergencies and be ready with the remedy when they happen, so as not to be taken by surprise. But there is a great difference between maturely considering an idea and giving it expression in instructions.

Gyulai in the mean time ordered the bridge over the Sesia at Vercelli to be blown up and the right wing of the 7th Corps to scout thence to the right into the mountains.

The 7th Corps did not meet any considerable forces beyond the Sesia and it was still supposed that the enemy's main forces were assembling at Alessandria.

16TH MAY.—Gyulai issued an order by which he meant to prevent individual hussars being killed by the peasants. This order had strategic consequences, because it paralyzed reconnaissance throughout the Austrian army. It directed that patrols should always be strong, and if possible, composed of cavalry and infantry.

It would have been just as well to have dispensed with cavalry altogether; for timely information of the enemy could not be received under such conditions.

This order therefore weakened one of the mainstays of strategy, viz. information about the enemy. Since we know from the war of 1870-71, what unlimited services cavalry can render to strategy, if it scout farther, very much farther, than infantry can follow, we need not discuss this subject in detail.

The Official Account does not give any movements or news of the enemy for the 16th May. Hence it seems that everything was quiet along the Austrian front. On the 16th the 1st Brigade (Braun) of the 9th Corps reached Piacenza; the others on the 17th and 18th; the few remaining battalions on the 23rd May. The 9th Corps was without artillery and cavalry and was supplied from the Artillery Reserve and Cavalry Division.

17TH MAY.—Because the enemy had, on the 15th May, put outposts on the islands of Santa Maria and Cavalino, situated in the Po, and two battalions with four guns had been observed marching from Valenza to Bassignana, apparently also because the enemy was weakening his forces at Valenza, Gyulai again feared that the enemy

might advance in an easterly direction crossing the Po at Pieve del Cairo. He therefore instructed the 8th Corps to concentrate the bulk of its troops towards its left, referred it to the 5th Corps for support and promised the assistance of the remaining three corps if necessary. Benedek drew his corps closer together, so that the enemy, after crossing at the point mentioned, would be contained in front by part, while the main body was to throw itself on his right flank.

A reconnoitring party of eighteen men advancing beyond the Po at Valenza, spiked some guns that had been left, and ascertained that the enemy had left the vicinity.

Toward evening on the 17th May the enemy reappeared at Valenza. At Vaccarizza he approached the bridge-head.

#### THE RECONNAISSANCE IN FORCE TOWARD MONTEBELLO.

18TH MAY.—The 8th Corps destroyed the remnants of an old pontoon bridge on the further side of the Po by artillery fire. This brought on an ineffective cannonade across the river.

The Commander-in-Chief ordered the whole army to close in on the position of the 8th Corps, i.e. the 2nd and 5th Corps were moved, and the rest ordered to be ready to march.

In obedience to this order the 2nd Corps took position between St. Giorgio and Cernago behind the 8th Corps, the 5th Corps along the Po from Sannazaro as far as the mouth of the Ticino. The movement became thus a mere lateral movement of the reserves to their left.

By a reconnaissance from Vercelli westward it was learned that the enemy had intended to attack that place, but fearing to be attacked himself, had retired on Casale. It was ascertained that a cavalry division and partisan troops were at San Germano. At other points movements of troops in all directions were observed and



the rumbling of heavy wagons heard. Some patrols claimed to have learned on the further bank of the Po, that heavy French and Piedmontese columns were moving eastward on Cornale.

Another scouting party was ordered from Piacenza toward Bobbio. It found that place unoccupied on the 17th, but when returning on the afternoon of the same day, French troops held it.

Upon the receipt of this information Gyulai believed his left wing seriously threatened.

19TH MAY.—The right wing was to be entirely withdrawn from Vercelli, and the whole main body of the army moved to the left. While therefore the 8th and 2nd and part of the 5th Corps remained in their positions along the Po from the mouth of the Sesia to that of the Ticino, the 7th Corps withdrew from Vercelli and blew up the bridge. Leaving a small corps of observation toward Vercelli and Palestro and one brigade along the Sesia from Palestro to its mouth, it marched to Mortara and Castel d'Agogna.

The 3rd Corps marched to Trumello and vicinity.

Three brigades of the 5th Corps under the corps commander marched on this day to Vaccarizza to make a reconnaissance in force toward Voghera on the 20th May.

The Cavalry Division remained in its place.

Numerous reports were received about the enemy up to the 20th, which reported great activity along the whole front south of the Po. One spy stated especially on the evening of the 19th, that a general offensive across the Po at Casale, Valenza, Silvano, Pancarana or Cervesina might be expected, and that at the same time Stradella would be threatened from the west and south. Whether that spy was bribed by the enemy, I leave you to guess.

The General-in-Chief of the Austrian army felt sure now that the enemy meant to attack and turn the Austrian left flank. A report received on the evening of the 19th to

the effect that large forces were assembling at and near Vercelli against the Austrian right flank, was not deemed of sufficient importance at headquarters to change the plans for the next day. The report of the occupation of Gattinara by Garibaldi not arriving until the 20th, could not influence the plans made for that day.

I may say here, that Gyulai's supposition was erroneous and that the Sardinian army crossed the Po at Casale and pushed heavy masses toward Vercelli, while the French army quietly remained in its position.

20TH MAY.—Instructions as to how to act on the defensive were published from headquarters. They occupy in the Official Account six closely printed quarto pages, not counting the orders for the supply columns. Once more three cases are presumed, none of which subsequently happened.

Count Stadion, commanding the 5th Corps, was ordered, with his three brigades at Vaccarizza, Boér's Brigade of the 8th Corps, which held the bridge-head there, one brigade of Urban's division, and Braum's Brigade of the 9th Corps, to make a reconnaissance in force against Casteggio and Voghera, to ascertain if the enemy contemplated making the main attack on the right bank of the Po. Should he meet superior forces, and should the enemy take the offensive, he was to retire on Vaccarizza and guard the Po from there to Spessa.

Count Stadion was also instructed on the 21st May that if the enemy should cross the Po and attack the rest of the army between Casale and the mouth of the Ticino, which he would know from the thunder of the guns, to attack the enemy vigorously on the south bank of the Po and draw upon himself as much of the adversary's forces as possible. But if the enemy did not attack, and if his reconnaissance against Voghera should show only weak forces of the enemy there, then his three brigades were to return on the 21st to Pavia and on the 22nd into the Lomellina to Zinasco and Pieve d'Albignola.

Stadion was also informed that the enemy was holding Bobbio with 4000 men, and that he therefore had to look out for his left flank.

The Official Account disapproves of troops from four different corps being used for this reconnaissance. It is true there might have been used for this purpose the three brigades of Stadion and three brigades of the 9th Corps, or the three brigades of Urban, for they were all available.

I cannot refrain from inviting your attention to the fact, how hazardous it is to make a decision, strategically so important like the one Count Stadion was to come to, dependent upon his perceiving from the sound of artillery fire, whether the enemy was taking the offensive beyond the Po or not. The sound of artillery fire is often deceptive. It happened to us before Paris, that heavy shells passed over our heads without the discharge of guns which sent them being audible.

It is also surprising that only six brigades were used for the undertaking of May 20th, although nearly the whole 9th Corps, the three brigades of Urban, the three brigades of Stadion and one brigade (Boér) of the 8th Corps were available. These forces moreover could not have been used in case the enemy crossed the Po and advanced northward on account of the distance.

Lastly, the course of the events will show that Count Stadion, after the reconnaissance, was unable to direct his troops in the manner prescribed by Gyulai for the 21st and 22nd May. This shows how useless, and therefore injurious, it is to plan details so far in advance, especially beyond an engagement with all its uncertainties.

20TH MAY.—The reconnaissance in force of Count Stadion on the 20th May led to the engagement of Montebello. Its details I shall not discuss as they belong to the domain of tactics; it only remains to consider its strategical import.

The Austrian troops advanced to Montebello and shortly after noon occupied the town and the position of Genes-

trelo, near Montebello, on a spur of the Apennines which commanded the plain. They were immediately attacked by French troops advancing from Voghera to meet them. The fight for the position and in the plain below was sharp and fluctuating, both sides pushing troops into the fight as they arrived. It was half-past seven in the evening before the French succeeded in taking Montebello and holding it. For Count Stadion was obliged to retreat when he saw the reserves of the enemy approaching. The latter did not pursue, but returned to Voghera that evening.

About 14,000 men all told took an active part in the engagement on the part of the Austrians; their losses were 1400 men. Only 7000 to 10,000 French are said to have been engaged, with a loss of 700 men. It is proper to remark here, that Bazaine's whole division was approaching to support the French and that Stadion's retreat was imperative under his instructions. The numerical superiority of the Austrians in the fight according to the above figures did not prevent the Austrian troops showing themselves quite equal to the French in many incidents, so that their leaders could regard with confidence their action in the future. In several instances single battalions and companies attacked superior numbers with brilliant results. Montebello has, therefore, justly become a day of glory for the Austrian troops.

The considerable losses, especially in missing, show clearly the doubtful value of such reconnaissances in force unless they are preliminary to taking the offensive, as eventually it is necessary to retreat, with all the material and moral disadvantages involved. For it is impossible to withdraw from such an engagement without loss in prisoners, especially after a hand-to-hand conflict. I read once—I think in Clausewitz's work, but cannot point out the place—the following: "He who does not know what he wants, but yet feels that he must do something, appeases his conscience by a 'reconnaissance in force.'"

It is interesting to look at the figures. There were available nearly four brigades of the 9th Corps, three of Urban's brigades, one brigade of the 8th Corps, three of the 5th Corps, total eleven brigades. There were used for this reconnaissance six brigades, and the nominal strength of each brigade was over 5000 infantry. But the actual strength of each brigade fell considerably short of the authorized strength. For the number actually engaged was 14,000 men. The rest were covering the flanks and rear.

If you were to read Gyulai's report to the Emperor on the engagement of Montebello you would form the opinion that the strategical effect of the action was bad for the Austrian army. For Gyulai became convinced from it that the enemy was preparing for an advance in the direction of Piacenza. In this he was completely mistaken, for at that very time his opponent was bent on an advance by way of Vercelli.

The engagement, however, was not without some advantage for the Austrian army, as the allies on their part believed that it was preliminary to a general offensive on the part of the Austrians south of the Po and westward toward Voghera. They, therefore, suspended the preparations already begun for the march to Vercelli, for fear of being attacked in rear, and prepared for defence at Voghera. Here you can see again, that the initiative always has some value even if not directed against the most favourable point.

Lastly, after the engagement of Montebello we again behold the comical spectacle of both sides making preparations for repulsing an attack by the enemy.

#### TO THE RE-OCCUPATION OF THE DEFENSIVE POSITION IN THE LOMELLINA.

21ST MAY.—Anticipating an advance of the enemy south of the Po eastward, Gyulai directed Count Stadion to halt at Vaccarizza and keep one brigade of the 9th

Corps near him. In the rear Urban was to guard the bridges over the Adda at Lodi and its vicinity. The troops retired during the night from the battle-field of Montebello and on the 21st stood as follows:—

Four brigades of the 9th Corps (the last brigade of which had arrived in the meantime) south of the Po, echeloned from Piacenza to St. Giovanni and Stradella.

Count Stadion with three brigades of his corps, one brigade of the 8th and one of the 9th Corps, at Vaccarizza.

Urban recrossed the Po and marched to Corte Olona.

The 8th Corps noticed much noise and commotion in its front on the other side of the Po, but reported that the enemy was not making preparations for an attack.

On the other hand, the enemy assumed a bolder front along the Sesia. Colonel Ceschi, who had been left at Borgo Vercelli with half a brigade to observe Vercelli, reported the concentration of considerable forces since evening of the 20th May at, above and below that place from Villato to Palestro, and that a serious attack was imminent; also that Garibaldi would reach Romagnano on the 21st, thus turning the right flank of the army.

The troops of the 7th Corps therefore moved early on the 21st nearer to the Sesia to Palestro and Candia, the reserves to Castel d'Agogna.

At headquarters the opinion still prevailed that the enemy on the Sesia could only consist of Garibaldi's volunteers. Nevertheless a division of the 2nd Corps was ordered from Cernano to Mortara to support the 7th Corps if necessary. Colonel Ceschi was ordered not to commit himself to an engagement, but to retire on Novara upon the advance of the enemy.

In the meantime the enemy had crossed the Sesia at Vercelli by noon and pushed Colonel Ceschi back. The latter retired behind the Agogna in the direction of Novara.

The commander of the 7th Corps, Zobel, decided to

thrust the enemy back over the Sesia on the next day.

On the 22nd May the troops of the 7th Corps were put in motion. At Palestro the enemy had only crossed over some cavalry, which soon retired across the river, but he opened a lively artillery fire from the further bank, during which the troops marching on Vercelli were halted to await results at Palestro. In the meantime Colonel Ceschi, reinforced by some cavalry, had advanced to Orfengo. Hostile cavalry was found at Borgo Vercelli, which, after a fine cavalry fight, was overthrown, and it was learned that Borgo Vercelli had been abandoned by the enemy. The reserves were therefore ordered back, but the passages of the Sesia at and north of Vercelli were not occupied.

Information was received that Garibaldi had advanced as far as Arona and Lago Maggiore.

Upon returning to Castel d'Agogna the corps was informed from headquarters, that the enemy's movements on the Sesia could only be those of Garibaldi's partisans, and that the principal aim of the corps should be to cover the flank of the army, where the Sesia emptied into the Po.

At the same time, however, Zobel received news of an impending passage of the lower Sesia in force. Dondorf's brigade stationed there had noticed at four different points concentrations of such masses of troops and such energetic preparations for a passage, that it deemed itself too weak to hold the line of the river and assembled at Candia. Dondorf's request for assistance did not reach headquarters of the 7th Corps at Castel d'Agogna during the day, but it reached the neighbouring corps (2nd and 8th), which put several brigades in motion for his support. These brigades were ordered back from army headquarters upon information of the return of the reserves of the 7th Corps. This caused very fatiguing marches and counter-marches to the 2nd Corps and to some troops of the 8th Corps.

These marches in turn caused army headquarters to censure the 7th Corps severely for allowing itself to be alarmed by demonstrations and tiring the troops out. It still clung to the idea that the enemy's main forces were echeloned from Alessandria to Casteggio and that on the Sesia he was making demonstrations only.

As a matter of fact the French army had pushed three corps to Voghera-Casteggio, the rest stood at Alessandria. But nearly the whole Piedmontese army was on the Sesia, one of its divisions had already crossed between Vercelli and Borgo Vercelli, and Garibaldi was at Castelletto on the Ticino.

Urban's troops marched from the Po northward toward the Adda (Brescia and Lodi) and were again assigned the task of crushing attempts at insurrection in Lombardy.

The 9th Corps remained this day in front of Piacenza toward Stradella, one brigade being on the left bank of the Po below Vaccarizza.

At headquarters information was received from Vienna that the head of the 1st Corps would arrive in Verona on the 30th.

This corps, like the 11th yet to come, was at once disposed of. As subsequent events, however, changed everything, I will not trouble you with the instructions given.

At midnight Gyulai gave orders, that at daybreak of the 23rd the 8th, 3rd and 7th Corps were to be in readiness to march.

In the meantime the last named had pushed one division forward to Candia, which was believed to be threatened, and undertaken a cannonade across the Sesia devoid of any result. North of Palestro little skirmishes had taken place. Colonel Ceschi (who had been relieved in the course of the day by Colonel von Mengen) had undertaken a reconnaissance toward Borgo Vercelli and found but small forces of the enemy, because General Cialdini had brought the main body of his division back



over the Sesia at Vercelli on account of a dangerous rise of the river. Garibaldi in his turning movements through the mountains, reached farther and farther around the Austrian right flank and occupied Varese. Gyulai therefore sent Colonel von Mengen a telegraphic order to occupy San Martino, and to Lieutenant Field-marshal Urban to move to Como and drive Garibaldi away. At Como and in its vicinity the inhabitants seemed to be in a state of unrest.

The rest of the Austrian army did not move.

The French army pushed part of its main forces a little farther east to Stradella and reinforced the troops at Bobbio while the bulk of the Piedmontese troops remained along the Sesia.

24TH MAY.—The 7th Corps pushed one division nearer to the Sesia in front of Candia in order to dislurb the enemy, who was keeping quietly in his camp.

The Official Account gives a detailed correspondence between army headquarters and corps headquarters, which is interesting in so far as the former finds fault with the defective outpost service of the latter, while the latter shows, that it could not seal hermetically an outpost line 43 miles long, from the mouth of the Sesia to Borgo Vercelli as far north as Novara, and from there to San Martino. Conflicting news came in of Garibaldi; some stated that he had gone to Arona, others that he was at Varese.

At army headquarters it was believed the enemy would cross the Po at Cornale during the day, and the necessary arrangements to meet the passage were made.

On the whole, however, both armies remained inactive. One brigade of the 9th Corps was placed at the disposal of Lieutenant-Field-Marshal Urban, who was hurrying troops against Garibaldi by rail and by road.

The 9th Corps had to send troops to the rear to hold the bridge-head of Borgoforte until the arrival of the 11th Corps.

Gyulai telegraphed to Vienna that on the Sesia the enemy was making demonstrations only.

25TH MAY.—Gyulai prepared for an attempt on the part of the enemy to cross at Cornale against the 8th Corps, and ordered the 5th Corps to recross the Ticino and march to Pieve d'Albignola and Zinasco Nuovo, while the 2nd and 3rd Corps were to be ready to support them. At the same time, however, he gave, the necessary instructions in case of a retreat beyond the Ticino being necessary. The 9th Corps was to advance toward Stradella and reconnoitre. Scouting parties were sent against Garibaldi in all directions. Urban assembled a brigade at Como to attack Garibaldi next day at Varese.

Early in the morning the 5th Corps shelled the enemy's camp across the Sesia and alarmed it.

The allies remained where they were, except that the greater part of the troops at Bobbio (Autemarre's division) was moved to Genestrello (near Montebello), which proves that they contemplated a defensive attitude, not an offensive toward the east.

26TH MAY.—Urban put one brigade (Ruprecht's) in motion from Como against Garibaldi and attacked Varese. After a slight engagement he retired to Como. In his report Urban complains of the defective training and behaviour of these troops, calls the engagement a sharp reconnaissance, and reports, that of Garibaldi's 14,000 men, 6000 or 7000 had been at Varese (Garibaldi only had 3000 men altogether).

According to the orders of the day before, the 5th Corps advanced two brigades to Pieve d'Albignola and Zinasco Nuovo, headquarters at Sannazzaro. The 9th Corps fearing an attack from Bobbio was ordered from army headquarters to scout into the mountains, and informed that the French with two Piedmontese divisions were in position from Alessandria to Voghera, the main body of the Piedmontese from Alessandria to Casale.

In a report to the Emperor, Gyulai gives the following position of the army on May 26th :

2nd Corps, St. Giorgio and Cernago.

3rd Corps, Trumello and Garlasco.

5th Corps, Sannazzaro, Pieve d'Albignola with one brigade in Vaccarizza.

7th Corps,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  brigades on the Sesia,  $\frac{1}{2}$  brigade at Novara, one brigade at Mortara.

8th Corps, 1 brigade at the mouth of the Sesia.

1 brigade at Porte Cornale.

1 brigade at Mede.

1 brigade at Lomello.

1 brigade at Vaccarizza.

9th Corps, 1 brigade at Vaccarizza.

3 brigades between Stradella and Piacenza.

1 brigade attached to Urban.

Cavalry Division, Vespolate and Gravellona.

Artillery Reserve, Gravellona, Lieutenant-Field-Marshal Urban at Como.

In this very long report, in which again three cases are dealt with, none of which actually happened, Gyulai expresses his satisfaction at his very strong position out of which the enemy would find it difficult to drive him. An advance of the enemy in an easterly direction toward Piacenza would be welcomed by the Austrian army, because then it could take the enemy in flank and rear from Vaccarizza. If the enemy should take the offensive against the 8th Corps and cross the Po, he would find himself before strong positions, would be unable to deploy, and four corps could be brought up against him, before he could develop any considerable force on this side of the Po. Any movement toward the flank on the part of the enemy would only be dangerous to the latter.

At the same time Gyulai stated, that he would send the 1st Corps to Casale-Pusterlengo, the 9th Corps to Borgoforte and Modena. It almost seems as if he did not know what to do with so many troops.

## THE THREE WEEKS IN THE LOMELLINA 169

The Allied Army had made no material movement that day and stood as follows :—

### THE FRENCH.

- I. Corps, Casteggio and Montebello.
- II. Corps, Voghera and vicinity.
- III. Corps, Voghera and vicinity as far as Tortona.
- IV. Valenza and vicinity.
- Guards : Alessandria and vicinity.
- V. Corps, 1 division at Genestrello near Montebello.  
1 division disembarking at Livorno.

### THE PIEDMONTESE.

- One division at Casale.
- One division at Vercelli.
- Three divisions between these two places echeloned along the Sesia.
- Garibaldi at Varese.

You will thus see how little Gyulai knew of the enemy's army, some of whose corps headquarters were but a day's march distant from his own.

On this day Napoleon made his preparations for the movement to the left with a view to turn the right of the Austrian position, personally reconnoitring Vercelli, sending around the trains and ordering bridges to be thrown.

## TENTH LETTER.

### PALESTRO AND THE RETREAT.

*(May 27th to June 2nd.)*

I CANNOT contradict you if you call it incomprehensible that the headquarters of the Austrian army had no idea of the enemy's intentions of turning the Austrian right at Vercelli. The fact that nothing was done by the allies seems to have caused some uneasiness, for their expected advance eastward, south of the Po, did not take place. Nor did they make any attempt to cross the Po at Valenza.

### THE FIGHTING AT PALESTRO.

27TH MAY.—The chief of the general staff was uneasy, it seems, with regard to the neighbourhood of Vercelli, for he telegraphed there for news. The answer that Borgo Vercelli had been evacuated by the enemy, does not seem to have allayed his fears, for he directed a reconnaissance to be made in that direction. Along the entire front nothing of importance happened. It is true the report of railroad trains (probably empty) moving from Vercelli in the direction of Casale, gave some confirmation to the idea that nothing was to be feared from this direction.

The Austrians were driven out of Como by Garibaldi. The threatening attitude of the inhabitants caused the Austrians to withdraw from the town on the 26th and to take up a commanding position at Camerlata to the south of and close to Como. Upon the report of the approach

of considerable forces of partisans, Urban retired thence to Monza. Late in the evening Garibaldi attacked with 3000 men at St. Fermo on the 27th May. The tactical success was doubtful, the strategical success great. Not only was Garibaldi allowed to occupy Como, but the Austrian flank and rear were so threatened, that the entire 1st Corps was ordered to Milan, where it was to arrive a few days later, instead of to Casale-Pusterlengo. Thus Garibaldi with 3000 partisans contained nearly three brigades of Urban's and the whole of the I. Army Corps.

28TH MAY.—Nothing of importance was done by the Austrians. A weak reconnaissance toward Borgo Vercelli and to the Sesia ended in a fruitless skirmish, in which, however, the enemy pushed some battalions forward from Vercelli, rendering a further advance of the scouting parties impracticable.

Reports were brought in by spies that considerable masses of the enemy stood at Vercelli, and that on the 26th May Napoleon had been in Vercelli in person and given orders for repairing the bridges over the Sesia. The outposts along the Po reported considerable movements of troops up the river on the further bank. The enemy destroyed the roads leading toward Piacenza south of the Po, and the 9th Corps reported that the enemy had withdrawn from Bobbio. This showed that the enemy did not contemplate an offensive toward the east at that point. Yet in his reports Gyulai clings to the opinion that the enemy would take the offensive at that point, and was making demonstrations at Vercelli in order to cause him to divide his forces, which he was not willing to do.<sup>1</sup>

29TH MAY.—Further reports were received at army headquarters, which indicated a concentration of the enemy's forces to the left. Numerous railroad trains were observed coming from Turin and Cassale and going to Vercelli. The enemy's right flank retired to Casteggio.

<sup>1</sup> This is like Wellington believing in spite of the evidence that Napoleon meant to attack his right flank in 1815.—ED.

More troops appeared at Valenza. In front of the 5th Corps large bodies of the enemy were observed marching up stream on the further bank. Patrols sent from the bridge-head at Vaccarizza reported the enemy retiring from Voghera upon Alessandria. The Chief Staff Officer calculated from the reports of spies that four divisions of the enemy (Piedmontese) must be assembled at Vercelli.

And yet Gyulai, according to his report of this day, believed the headquarters of the Piedmontese to be at Occimiano, that of the French at Alessandria. That the enemy's right wing and centre would cross the Po and attack him (Gyulai) in front, in order to push him over the Ticino, and that the enemy's left wing would try to turn him from Casale by way of Oleggio. He believed, also, that the French army was not yet ready for the offensive.

In a telegram of the same date he expresses his opinion that the enemy seemed to lay more stress on Vercelli.

Nothing was done on this day except that orders were issued to have the positions of Candia and Frassinetto opposite the mouth of the Sesia fortified, and that Gaal's brigade of the 5th Corps was to move from Vaccarizza to Sannazzaro, where the 5th Corps was assembled.

The 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 7th and 8th Corps, except Boér's brigade of the last-named, which was left at Vaccarizza, were now all assembled in the Lomellina. The 9th Corps and Boér's brigade were on both banks of the Po from Piacenza to Vaccarizza. Urban with three brigades was north of Milan, where the 1st Corps was just arriving. Its leading brigade was directed on Bergamo, because it was feared that Garibaldi would try to take that town by surprise.

Before discussing the events of the next six decisive days, permit me to recapitulate the positions of the troops in the Lomellina on the 29th May:—

The 7th Corps had two and a half brigades scattered along the Sesia on outpost duty from Palestro to the mouth of the Sesia on a front of  $9\frac{1}{2}$  miles, the main body at Mortara nearly 19 miles from Vercelli, a flank guard at Novara and in the bridge-head of San Martino on the Ticino, more than 20 miles from Vercelli.

The 2nd Corps stood at San Giorgio and Cernago,  $14\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Palestro, i.e. about 20 miles from Vercelli.

The 3rd Corps at Trumello and vicinity, 19 miles from Palestro, 24 miles from Vercelli.

The 8th Corps (exclusive of Boér's brigade at Vaccarizza) at Lomello, Mede and the vicinity, guarding the Po, 19 miles from Palestro, 24 from Vercelli.

The 5th Corps at Sannazzaro and vicinity, leading troops along the Po,  $28\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Palestro, and 33 from Vercelli.

Artillery Reserve at Gravellona,  $14\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Vercelli.

The Cavalry Division at Vespolate, 7 miles from Vercelli, with numerous patrols pushed nearer to Vercelli to fill the gap in the line of outposts between Palestro, Confienza and Novara.

Thus, if the enemy crossed in force by the existing bridges at Vercelli, the 7th Corps could oppose him on the same day with but a small portion of its force, viz. the outposts with their supports, guarding, by companies and battalions, the roads by which the enemy approached.

If we suppose that it were recognized by noon—which, however, would be uncertain—that the attack was serious and not a mere demonstration, and that all necessary orders were at once issued, then the 7th Corps might be concentrated early on the next day, and supported by the 2nd Corps, the Artillery Reserve and the Cavalry Division. The assistance of the 3rd and 8th Corps could not be counted upon before the evening of the second day, and not with absolute certainty until the morning of the third day, while the 5th Corps could in the most favour-



able case arrive only during the third, probably not until the fourth day. Boér's brigade of the 8th Corps and the portions of the 9th Corps stationed from Vaccarizza to Piacenza which were 53 to 72 miles away from Palestro-Vercelli, I have not taken into consideration at all.

The concentration must necessarily be deferred as long as the intentions of the enemy were not manifest and it remained uncertain, whether it was a real offensive or a mere demonstration calculated to draw the major part of the troops to the north.

Only by making such calculations can we explain why, in the days next following, the Austrian army failed to fulfil the expectations which were entertained by the whole military world. For everybody thought that, should the allies attempt to cross the Sesia, the Austrian army would be able to fall upon and crush the enemy's troops as they crossed the river.

As it was, even if the enemy had only had two bridges, one army corps at least might cross on each daily (and perhaps two, since it was not necessary to take the trains at once) and so be able to have each day more troops available than the Austrians. But he increased the number of his bridges and thus ensured a crushing superiority.

#### PALESTRO.

30TH MAY.—At 11.30 a.m. the Austrian outposts at Palestro and Vinzaglio noticed large bodies of the enemy approaching from Vercelli. The former place was held by a battalion, the latter by half a company. A division was advancing against each. In spite of the most heroic defence delaying the enemy over an hour, the troops were of course unable to hold their ground and had to retire. Reinforcements of two battalions and five companies respectively came too late and were the more unable to effect anything, inasmuch as a third division of the enemy came up at Confienza. Thus only a portion of

Weigel's brigade was opposed to three divisions of the enemy, or to a more than sixfold superiority. After 4 p.m. it retired to Bobbio. Some of the troops escaped disaster only by marvellous bravery and energy. A scouting party from Novara toward Borgo Vercelli had in the meantime come upon the third French division just mentioned and somewhat delayed its march.

At 3.30 p.m. Gyulai at Garlasco received by telegraph the first news of the enemy's advance, and, in the course of the afternoon, further despatches as to what had happened. Although Weigel's brigade had not succeeded in retaking Palestro, the 7th Corps believed the enemy's movements to be a mere reconnaissance to divert the Austrian army from Frassinetto. This opinion was too much in accord with that hitherto entertained by Gyulai not to be shared by him. He informed the Emperor to this effect, and also told the other corps.

On the same day, however, one division was put in motion from Cernago to Castel d'Agogna, 7 miles nearer to the 7th Corps, and orders issued for the Cavalry Division and some batteries of the Artillery Reserve to reinforce the 7th Corps next day. Boér's brigade was to join the 8th Corps, and all the other corps to be ready to march at a moment's notice, more, however, in anticipation of a frontal attack against them under cover of the demonstration, than for the support of the 7th Corps.

The latter was enjoined not to make isolated attacks. At the same time reports arrived from the 3rd and 8th Corps, stating that the enemy had retired from Voghera, hence an attack from that direction was improbable. Thus towards evening Gyulai, attributing more importance to the enemy's attack at Palestro, went to Mortara himself late at night and assembled the whole 2nd Corps there.

In order to gain definite information as to the enemy's intentions, Gyulai ordered Lieutenant-Field-Marshal Zobel (7th Corps) to attack Palestro next morning with

Lilia's division of his own and Jellaçiq's division of the 2nd Corps. The official account intimates that Gyulai and his chief staff officer differed in their opinions, for the latter enjoined caution on General Zobel in his attack. He had good reason to do so, since he had calculated the enemy, who stood at Vercelli, on the 29th, at four divisions, i.e. twice as strong as Zobel. The other division of the 7th Corps was to halt opposite Frassinetto.

As Palestro remained in the hands of the enemy, the Austrian outposts could not see that the French were throwing bridges there over the Sesia, by which Canrobert's troops began to defile next morning, while the French IV. Corps advanced through Cameriano after crossing in rear of the Piedmontese by the bridges at Vercelli.

31ST MAY.—Thus Zobel attacked a position in which the enemy had assembled 90,000 men by 1 p.m., with about an army corps (i.e. two halves of different corps).

The result of the engagement, which afterward was called a reconnaissance, could not be doubtful. The troops again advanced with great bravery, and pushed the enemy's advanced troops back to Palestro, where the Italian division of Cialdini was seriously embarrassed for some time. Zobel, however, discontinued the attack when he became convinced of the enemy's crushing superiority. He saved his corps from a general catastrophe by giving timely orders for withdrawal. Disaster only overtook those portions of Szabo's brigade, which, forming the left wing, was fighting in an isolated position, it was rolled up by Canrobert's Corps, which suddenly debouched against it. Weigel's brigade having come upon an enemy 20,000 strong at Confienza, could effect nothing, retired to Robbio and joined Zobel's main body. The fragments of Szabo's brigade retired beyond St. Angelo, where they rallied on the main body of the approaching 2nd Corps. For when all of Zobel's troops

began to retire, Gyulai telegraphed to the 2nd Corps to march with its remaining troops to Robbio. At 2 o'clock he decided to bring the 3rd Corps also there and attack the enemy next day with the three corps thus united.

The 3rd Corps had previously received orders early in the morning to move from Trumello and Garlasco to S. Albino and Trumello. It was to cook and eat at noon. In the course of the day it received several different orders and halted in the evening at Castel d'Agogna, leaving one division at Mortara.

The head of the 2nd Corps in the meantime advanced to Castel Nuovo pushing in between Lilia's division at Robbio on the right and Reischach's division of the 7th Corps at Candia.

In front of the latter division the enemy had been quiet on the 30th, and made only slight demonstrations on the 31st at Frassinetto by putting pontoons on the river.

Thus at nightfall on 31st May the 2nd and 7th Corps stood in the first line from Candia to Robbio; in rear of them was the 3rd Corps with one division at Castel d'Agogna, the other at Mortara.

In front of the 5th and 8th Corps everything was quiet during the day. But Colonel Mengen's half brigade was alarmed between 7 and 8 o'clock in the evening. The enemy (the French IV. Corps) appeared at Lumellongo in front of Novara.

In considering the tactical result of the engagement at Palestro on the 31st May, the mere relinquishing of the attack with a loss of 2000 men and seven guns may be called insignificant in view of the enemy's three and four fold superiority. If such a small force, as Zobel's was in this instance, attacks large masses of the enemy, and on so extended a front, it would seem that the enemy should be able to attack it in turn, and crush it. Nothing of the kind happened.

The enemy with all his superiority rested contented

with repulsing the attack, and allowed the assailants to withdraw unmolested.

The strong point of the initiative, of taking the lead, of quickness of movement, of assuming the offensive, in strategy, is that it compels the enemy to conform to the movements made. Large masses on the defensive cannot take the offensive in a moment like a company or battalion, which, after delivering a few volleys on the defensive, can advance against the enemy on the offensive at the command "forward, double march." If the commander of an army of 90,000 men deems himself reduced to the defensive and has given orders accordingly, some time, usually a whole day, elapses before the counter-orders for the offensive can be executed.

In crossing at Vercelli, the allies were, generally speaking, taking the offensive. But in the engagement at Palestro on May 31st they were on the defensive as against Zobel's attack. They could not know whether the whole Austrian army was advancing to the attack with united forces. Moreover, they expected something of the kind from the enemy. When the latter's attack ceased, it was too late to make arrangements for taking the offensive.

You are probably going to say that at Austerlitz Napoleon I. did indeed pass thus rapidly from the defensive to the offensive with large masses of troops. But this change had been anticipated and all the arrangements made. His defensive on the 2nd December, 1805, was only a trap as it were, into which he enticed his opponent.

In this instance Zobel escaped with much smaller loss owing to his quickness, than if he had allowed himself to be attacked by the enemy's superior forces.

We learn from this that in strategy it is always better to do something, even if it is not the wisest thing that might be done, rather than to remain inactive.

On the same day, in another part of the theatre of

war, the indefatigable Garibaldi compelled Lieutenant-Field-Marshal Urban to put his united three brigades in motion against his three thousand partisans. He advanced against Varese, which he shelled. Meanwhile Garibaldi made an unsuccessful attempt to surprise Laveno, and then retreated northward into the Alps. Garibaldi had evidently inscribed upon his colours the motto of the great Napoleon: "*Activité! activité vitesse!*"

In the course of the day the outposts of the 8th Corps and Boér's brigade, which had marched to Lumello, sent in reports, that hostile troops had marched up stream on the further bank of the Po to Casale, and that Voghera and Bassignana had been evacuated by the enemy. The reports of the 9th Corps confirmed this, and from all the information received it was to be inferred, that it was not the enemy's intention to take the offensive and cross the Po. Yet as late as the evening of the 31st May Gyulai believed himself threatened most from this direction. An attack in force by the enemy from Frassinetto appeared to him most probable.

1ST JUNE.—He made his preparations accordingly. The 2nd, 3rd, and 7th Corps (exclusive of Reischach's division) were to repulse the enemy's "false attack" and drive him back over the Sesia. This he hoped to accomplish during the day and to return with his three corps at an early hour to the defence of the Po. At the same time the 5th and 8th Corps with Reischach's division of the 7th Corps were to guard the Po. Only two brigades of the 5th Corps were ordered to Ottobiano and vicinity, whence they could reach Robbio or support Reischach's division in one day. Convinced that he would quickly dispose of the enemy at Palestro, Gyulai directed his principal aim at Frassinetto, and specially instructed his corps what to do, should the attack come from that direction.

The troops of the 1st Corps, which were then arriving, were now directed to the bridge-head of San Martino by

way of Milan, for fear lest the enemy might under cover of the demonstration at Palestro throw regular troops into the Alps to support Garibaldi. Up to the 31st May inclusive, nearly two brigades had arrived. Corps headquarters arrived on the night of June 1st.

#### THE RETREAT.

The three corps did not attack on June 1st. The official account states that it knows of no reason for a counter-order, which it seems was issued suddenly and precipitately. For the 3rd Corps had been informed of the change of plan of the Commander-in-Chief by 6 a.m., while the 2nd Corps seems to have waited for orders to attack until 10 o'clock.

To find an explanation for this change it is necessary to infer the reason from the events, and thus lift the veil of secrecy which usually covers the inner workings of a headquarters. From several indications—for instance, the calculation of Colonel Baron Kuhn of the enemy's strength at Vercelli on the 29th May, and from the caution he enjoined upon Lieutenant-Field-Marshal Zobel in the attack at Palestro—I conclude that up to that time he disagreed with his general as to the strength of the enemy's forces which had crossed the Sesia. Might he not have succeeded early on the morning of June 1st in prevailing with his opinion, that the enemy was advancing in force and not merely making demonstrations? It is probable that detailed reports of the engagement on the 31st May did not reach army headquarters until some time during the night. From these it might have been learned that Szabo's brigade had been destroyed by a French corps. Perhaps Colonel Mengen had learned that the forces which had alarmed him at Novara on the evening of the 31st, were French. If Gyulai now recognized that he had to do with the enemy's main body, it was but natural for him to avoid bringing on a decisive battle with only two and a half army corps. If he

had attacked, a decisive battle could not have been avoided.

On the 1st June his forces on the theatre of war consisted of seven army corps. Of these one corps (two brigades of the 1st Corps and three of Urban's brigades) was detained in the vicinity of Milan, San Martino and Varese to cover the rear and right flank against the enterprises of 3000 partisans. Three and a half army corps (9th, 5th, and 8th Corps, and Reischach's division of the 7th Corps) guarded the Po from Piacenza to the mouth of the Sesia, against an enemy the greater part of which was no longer there. Thus there only remained two and a half corps (2nd, 3rd, and half of the 7th Corps) with which to accept a decisive battle at Palestro. To act in this manner was a gross violation of all the elementary rules of strategy, the main rule of which is to be as strong as possible for the decisive battle. Two days before Gyulai himself had cautioned the 7th Corps not to make an isolated attack.

Facing the Austrians were four Piedmontese divisions with a French corps on each flank. That a further French corps (the II.) had crossed the Sesia in rear of the left wing on the 31st May and camped at Borgo Vercelli, that the French Guards were at Vercelli and the remaining reserves of the Piedmontes and the French I. Corps at Casale, Gyulai did not know, but he might have considered it possible.

In fact, one division only (Autemarre's division of the V. Corps) had remained south of the Po echeloned from Torona to Alessandria, besides one half of the last Piedmontese division and some Piedmontese cavalry.

I cannot help thinking that Gyulai was disconcerted by the discovery that he had the whole army of the enemy in his front. The main body of which he had up to this time supposed to be south of the Po, stood suddenly, and as though risen out of the ground at, and in the rear of, his right flank. Even in ordinary life it is difficult for any-



one to at once grasp a new and totally changed situation, after having believed it for a long time to be something quite different. Suddenly Gyulai saw all his calculations and suppositions fail, he was seriously threatened on the flank on which he had not apprehended anything serious up to this time, he had to make new plans and under immense responsibility! Even supposing that he became aware as early as 6 a.m. that he could not risk an attack, I am not surprised that the necessary orders were not issued until four hours later.

On all this came the news of the loss of Novara.

Mengen had been driven out of it at daybreak by superior numbers of the French, and into the bridge-head of San Martino.

The first orders were issued at 10 o'clock. Reischach's division<sup>1</sup> was to remain at Candia facing Frassinetto, the other division (Lilia's) to return to Castel d'Agogna, leaving small detachments at Rosasco, the 2nd Corps was to go to Mortara in reserve, the 3rd Corps to push from Castel d'Agogna and Mortara one division to Robbio (replacing Lilia's division) and another to Albonese and Nicorvo, the Cavalry Division to concentrate at Borgo Lavezzaro and send patrols northward.

The execution of these orders would have led to clashes and crossings of the columns on the march.

Two hours latter the order was rescinded. Reports of an advance of the enemy upon Vespolate caused the Commander-in-Chief to move the whole 3rd Corps to the northward, one division to Vespolate, the other to the north of Mortara. Lilia's division was not yet relieved. The Cavalry Division was to take post on the right flank of the division ordered to Vespolate.

Information was sent to Vienna, to the governor of Milan and to the 1st Corps that the enemy were between Vercelli and Novara 50,000 strong, and threatening Magenta. The latter point the 1st Corps was enjoined

<sup>1</sup> 7th Corps.—ED.

to occupy. The troops however which had arrived, had been sent off that forenoon to occupy the Ticino from Sesto Calende downwards in compliance with former instructions, and an attempt was therefore made to communicate with Lieutenant-Field-Marshal Urban whose whereabouts was unknown. The 1st Corps received the order in the evening and reported that it would unite six battalions and twelve guns at Magenta by next morning and reinforce from there the bridge-head of San Martino. For Colonel Mengen had reported, that his troops (twelve companies) were not sufficient to fully man the works. The 9th Corps was ordered to strengthen the bridge-head of Vaccarizza.

Between 4 and 5 p.m. the dispositions were again changed from headquarters.

One brigade of the 3rd Corps was to move to Vigevano to hold the passage of the Ticino at that point. In the evening the corps in connection with Mensdorff's cavalry division, guarded the country toward the north from Vespolate on the Agogna to Vigevano on the Ticino. The outposts were in advance of this line.

The 2nd Corps, after all, was to relieve Lilia's division at Robbio and Rosasco next morning, the 7th Corps to take position at Castel d'Agogna leaving Reischach's division at Frassinetto. This order was, however, suspended at 1.30 p.m.

Count Stadion (5th and 8th Corps) was directed to concentrate his forces, and to observe the Po with small detachments, since a crossing of the river by the enemy had become improbable, and to prepare for a retreat across the Ticino at Pavia, but not to begin the movement. In this order Gyulai for the first time expresses the possibility, that the enemy might have concentrated his main body at Vercelli to manœuvre him out of his position by a turning movement. But some apprehension of an offensive against Stradella, south of the Po, is still expressed.

Urban, in the meantime had occupied Varese and appointed civil administrators for the town. Garibaldi

had intended to attack him, but failed to do so. The approach of the 1st Corps made it possible to reinforce the garrison of the bridge-head of San Martino during the night. Reischach on the lower Sesia had alarmed the troops on the further banks by artillery fire, which was replied to, and sent a patrol of hussars across the river by swimming. By these means it was ascertained that the enemy's troops were constantly in motion from Casale toward Vercelli. Otherwise no enemy was come in contact with during the day.

In the evening Gyulai reported to the Emperor the occupation of Novara by the enemy adding that the latter was now probably much stronger there than he had reported that morning: he also speaks of the unusual quiet in front of all his outposts.

The latter proves that he had hardly any information of the enemy's main body, which was then executing a flank march close to his front.

I cannot refrain from inviting your attention to the fact that Gyulai on this day again changed orders several times within the space of six hours, although "unusual" quiet prevailed in front of all his outposts.<sup>1</sup>

2ND JUNE.—Once more orders and counter orders were issued.

In the first place at 1.30 a.m. an order was issued, that the 2nd and 7th Corps, under orders to be relieved next morning, were not to be relieved.

Between 7 and 9 a.m. these corps were ordered to retire to Mortara and Olevano respectively. Count Stadion (commanding 5th and 8th Corps) was ordered to send the two brigades at San Giorgio and Cergnago to Mortara and to put the rest of both corps in readiness for an immediate retreat across the Ticino. Lieutenant-Field-Marshal Count Clam (1st Corps) was advised that the army was retiring behind the Ticino, and

<sup>1</sup> The original says within two or four hours, but the first orders were sent out at 10 a.m., the last between 4 and 5 p.m.—ED.

was told to hold the passage of the Ticino at San Martino. Urban was placed under his orders and he was to stop him from moving to Como.

The reserves of the 3rd Corps were pushed northward to Vespolate in the direction of Novara (at 10.30 a.m.), and the corps placed in a position so as to cover the retreat of the army against a flank attack from Novara. But excepting a few small skirmishes nothing happened there. It was reported that south of Novara the enemy was not in force, while large bodies of the enemy were said to be marching from Vercelli to Novara.

At 11.30 a.m. the 2nd and 7th Corps were ordered not to retire, the latter was to re-occupy Robbio and Candia. Lieutenant-Field-Marshal Count Clam at Milan was notified, that the army would not retire behind the Ticino and that the order of that morning was rescinded.

At twelve noon the opposite plan was adopted in favour of retiring at once behind the Ticino.

The 2nd Corps was therefore ordered to fall back at once through Vigevano behind the Ticino (resting one hour at Mortara), to camp that night on the river and move to Magenta on the 3rd June.

The 7th Corps was to march to Vigevano, camping between the town and the bridge-head.

The 3rd, facing toward Novara, was to cover the retreat during the day, and march next day to Abbiategrasso, taking up a position south of Ozero facing the Ticino. It was to take the Cavalry Division with it and send it to Magenta on June 4th.

The 1st Corps was informed of this and enjoined to move with the main body to Magenta, to strongly occupy the bridge-head of San Martino, to post outposts to the north along the Ticino and to hold the passages at Turbigo and Tornavento. If the bridge-head of San Martino could not be held, the guns were to be spiked, the bridge to be destroyed, etc.

The 5th Corps was ordered to Garlasco, the 8th to

Trumello with outposts on the Agogna. For the 3rd June, both Corps were ordered to retire behind the Ticino at Bereguardo, where they were to take position, the 5th Corps with the reserves at Rosate facing the Ticino, one division of the 8th on its left and three brigades and the reserves of the latter at Binasco.

The 9th Corps was informed as to the movements and directed to leave troops in observation between Stradella and Piacenza, to echelon the main body between Corte Olona and Casal Pusterlengo, and guard the country from Vaccarizza to Piacenza toward the Po.

At 12 o'clock the Emperor was informed by telegram of the plan adopted, supported by the statement that the strategical turning of his right flank had been effected by the enemy with superior forces, that the left flank and the lower Po were threatened, and that Gyulai felt it to be his duty to save the strength of the army for future operations.

The following sentence contained in the rough copy of the telegram, but not sent forward, "In order to reach the central position behind the Mincio with unimpaired strength," is characteristic of this general's views.

The Emperor replied: "Hold the Ticino at any rate, by a vigorous offensive movement."

This reply arrived at 4 p.m. Gyulai reported at 9.30, that the order could no longer be carried out, that it would require two days before he could advance again, when it would be too late, owing to the enemy's superiority.

In the meantime a telegram was sent from Vienna at 6.15 p.m. that Master-General of Ordnance Hess, who was familiar with the Emperor's views, was about to start and would arrive at Milan at midnight. A statement of the positions which the army was to reach on June 3rd was forwarded to Milan to meet him.

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In consequence of all these different orders and

counter-orders, the troops had to make the following movements during the 2nd June.

The 2nd Corps, beginning its retreat at 8.30 a.m., was near Mortara, when the third counter-order arrived stopping its retreat. It does not appear from the official account whether the corps advanced again. It seems to have waited in column of march. In the afternoon it marched back in compliance with the last order, crossed the Ticino at Vigevano and bivouacked between Soria and this river. The last troops arrived there three hours after midnight.

The 7th Corps had been unable to carry out entirely the counter-order issued at 11.30 a.m., or to re-occupy Robbio, which the enemy, finding evacuated, had re-occupied. One battalion had been left at Candia. Having received the last order to retreat, the corps left Castel d'Agogna at 3 o'clock p.m. At Mortara it met the columns of the 2nd Corps and had to wait until they had passed. Toward midnight it reached its destined bivouac at Vigevano. No rations were issued during the day, as usually happens when several counter-orders are issued.

The 3rd Corps practically remained in its previous position, and in the evening one of its brigades was at Vespolate, one at Tornaco, one at Borgo Lavezzaro, one at Vigevano. Between them Mensdorff's Cavalry Division.

The 5th Corps camped that night at Garlasco and Borgo San Siro ; part of the troops arrived at the bivouac late at night, others not until 3 o'clock a.m.

The 8th Corps marched at 4.30 p.m. and camped that night at Trumello.

The 9th Corps began that day to concentrate as ordered.

The last-named four corps scarcely came in contact with the enemy. The 8th Corps sent patrols across the Po before it marched, but found no enemy there.

More important events happened at and to the north of Magenta. The battalions holding the bridge-head of

San Martino had nothing to eat on June 1st, nor was it possible to give them rations on the 2nd. Count Clam found the bridge-head ill adapted for its purpose, the troops too few to hold the extensive works and so exhausted by hunger, that he had no confidence in being able to oppose a superior enemy. In addition the enemy was reported to have crossed the river and thrown a bridge at Turbigo, which defile had been ordered to be occupied next day. Clam therefore ordered the bridge-head to be abandoned, the guns to be spiked and the bridge to be blown up. This was done in the night of the 2nd June; but the bridge remained passable for infantry, the explosion being only partially successful.

Several battalions were sent forward to Turbigo, reaching Inveruno and its vicinity.

On the night of June 2nd to 3rd:

The 3rd Corps with the Cavalry Division was on the line Vespolate-Vigevano.

The 2nd Corps on the left bank close to the Ticino, having crossed the river at Vigevano.

The 7th Corps at Vigevano on the right bank.

The 5th Corps at Garlasco and vicinity.

The 8th Corps at Trumello.

The 9th Corps was in the act of concentrating, preparatory to echeloning itself from Casal-Pusterlengo to Corte Olona.

Those portions of the 1st Corps which had arrived, were at Magenta, with detachments toward Turbigo.

Urban at Varese and Somma. Having received only part of the orders and counter-orders, he felt obliged to remain inactive. A scouting party only was sent to Sesto Calende.

With regard to the enemy, it was learned that he had pushed considerable forces across the river at Turbigo, that his main forces were moving on the bridge-head of San Martino and that he had occupied Trecate with one division.

A considerable part of the Austrian army had marched late into the night, and those troops which had marched longest had received no rations.

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In connection with the events of this day, I cannot refrain from making a few comments on points of strategical detail, although I mean to defer the discussion as a whole until after the description of the operations.

Though it is generally recognized, and though I am again exposing myself to the charge of repetition, yet the first thing that strikes me is the importance from a strategical point of view of the proper subsistence of the troops. A large part of the army suffered from hunger on this date. One of the main reasons which Clam gives for the evacuation of the bridge-head of San Martino, a point of strategical importance, is the exhaustion of the garrison from hunger. In spite of the most careful arrangements for their subsistence, troops may have to undergo serious privations in extraordinary cases, as I have stated before. At the bridge-head of San Martino there was no such reason. Most of the troops in the bridge-head had just arrived from home by rail. Had they carried an "iron ration" for three days, they would not have suffered from hunger, at least not during the first two days after detraining. The narrow-mindedness of the supply officers at Milan, who refused rations to the 1st Corps on the plea that they had none intended for it, cannot be censured too severely.<sup>1</sup> But the fact that the garrison of the bridge-head was unable to get anything by requisitions in the vicinity of Magenta, is so surprising to me, that I can only suppose that the troops had not been properly instructed how to levy them.

I must again invite your attention to the pernicious consequences of the frequent counter-orders, when issued by so high an authority as the commander of an army.

<sup>1</sup> These officers had evidently learned nothing from English experience in the Crimean war.—ED.



"*Ordre ! Contreordre ! Desordre !*" once said an authority, I forget who; the expression is a familiar one in our army. Exhaustion of the troops is the unavoidable consequence of counter-orders issuing from army headquarters at a time when the movements ordered for the day are in the process of execution. They also, as a rule, cause terrible confusion, which delays the movements and causes the troops to get out of hand. For, at such sudden changes, many have no time to ascertain exactly how to move, and so lose the road. On account of their distance in rear of the army corps, supply trains cannot come up with the troops, when orders are changed during the march, and the troops go hungry in consequence. If such counter-orders are repeated during the day, and if the trains are ordered hither and thither, forwards and backwards, if clumsy vehicles have to be turned round, etc., the roads become blocked and there ensues a confusion which it is difficult to undo. Whoever has once seen such an occurrence in war, as I have more than once, knows what it means only too well.

However, counter-orders cannot always be avoided in war, not even in those emanating from army headquarters. I saw such a day in 1870. It was when the supreme command of our army was informed of MacMahon's flank march around our right, and had to change quickly the direction of march of the two armies from west to the north. The troops of our corps received the order about noon. All were on the march. Misunderstandings, crossing of columns, delays, losing the road, exhaustion, all happened to a greater or lesser extent. No rations were distributed that day. The iron ration alone saved the men from absolute hunger. But on this occasion the counter-order was necessary. Had the supreme command of the army allowed the original marching orders to be carried out, the brilliant success of Sedan would never have been won.

But where the enemy's movements do not render them absolutely necessary, counter-orders must be avoided. The 2nd June, 1859, shows this. And on that day they were not necessitated by any information as to the movements of the enemy. For practically none was obtained. The counter-orders originated from the Commander-in-Chief, according to the view he happened at the moment to hold with regard to the situation.

It is therefore much better for the supreme commander to take the time necessary to thoroughly consider the various factors affecting decision rather than to issue premature orders or orders for a long time in advance. Not merely "first consider, then dare," but "consider well before taking any action at all." Of course the principle must be adhered to of issuing orders sufficiently early for the subordinate commanders, army corps, divisions, etc., to have time to understand the general situation and carry out everything in proper order. If the movements are arranged for too far ahead, subordinate commanders may be led into ideas which cannot be carried out later on, thereby leading to misunderstandings, as I have before explained. On the 2nd June we have such a case. The 5th and 8th Corps had been informed several days before that they were to prepare for a retreat behind the Ticino, and Pavia had been designated as the point at which to cross. When the retreat was carried out, they had to cross at Bereguardo. Such a sudden change of the lines of communication always causes great confusion in the arrangements behind the front, for supplying ammunition and provisions, upon which the very life of the army depends. This becomes more apparent if you represent to yourself each corps as a serpent about 38 miles in length, the head and fore part of which consists of the combatants. If the rear portion of the serpent becomes entangled with a neighbouring one, the head can no longer act as freely as before. To change the lines of

retreat and communication is particularly disastrous, if made at the moment when the retreat begins, because the confusion in rear blocks the roads and renders the practicability of the retreat doubtful.

Lastly I must invite your attention to some of the marches made. The 2nd Corps started from the Sesia on the 2nd June and passed the Ticino that evening at Vigevano.

The rear guard of the 7th Corps left the Sesia (Candia) some hours after noon and camped that night on the right bank of the Ticino at Vigevano; it would not have found it necessary to make a night march, had not the roads been occupied by the troops of the 2nd Corps.

At the opening of the campaign it took the army three days to cross the Ticino and reach the Sesia, although the movements were not then hampered by the enemy. I shall refer to this difference in time later on.

The various orders, often conflicting and rescinding, which Gyulai issued on the first two days of June, make it seem as though the sudden appearance of the enemy's main body at Vercelli and Palestro had impaired his judgment. I consider this quite human, and in this instance almost pardonable, although a good soldier should never lose his composure. Early on June 1st he had suddenly become aware that his whole view of the situation, all his premises, were devoid of real foundation. The great security which he had felt in his position in the Lomellina, and about which he had reported to the Emperor with such confidence, was suddenly shattered. He saw the fate of his army, and his own honour seriously compromised. The whole weight of the strategist's responsibility of which I spoke in the beginning of my first letter, made itself suddenly felt with terrible stress. It requires an extraordinary strength of character to keep one's head under such a stroke of fate. Most men, even those who may have attained with honour the highest

military rank, would not be equal to such an emergency, unless they had been previously accustomed to critical situations. This happened with Gyulai. The official account alludes to his state of mind. It mentions a letter written by Hess to Vienna on the 3rd, in which he says that he tried "to cheer" him.

## **ELEVENTH LETTER.**

### **THE BATTLE OF MAGENTA.**

AT 5 a.m., June 3rd, Master-General of Ordnance Baron Hess, who had just arrived from Vienna, met Count Gyulai on the Ticino bridge at Bereguardo, the latter being on his way to Rosate, his new headquarters (changed afterward to Abbiategrasso). Upon instructions from Hess orders were issued from Bereguardo for the 3rd Corps, if not already across the river, in which case it was to hold Vigevano with at least one brigade, to remain at Vigevano on the right bank of the Ticino until further orders. The 5th and 8th Corps were ordered to halt wherever this order might reach them and await further developments.

Hess apparently contemplated an energetic offensive toward Novara from the south, a blow, which he had struck with great success in 1849.

In the meantime information was received at headquarters that the enemy had thrown a bridge at Turbigo, that Clam was marching against it (this report was erroneously interpreted as though he were marching north with all his forces, while in fact he had only sent a reconnoitring party), and furthermore his plans seem also to have been influenced by the report of the partial success only in blowing up the bridge over the Ticino at San Martino. It does not appear from the official records when this last report reached headquarters. It is probable, however, that it influenced Hess to allow the withdrawal of the last three corps from beyond the river to continue. For supposing the enemy to have crossed

considerable forces at Turbigo the day before and now to possess the bridge at San Martino also, there was danger of Clam being crushed at Magenta unless supported by timely, energetic and direct assistance.

Clam himself had asked for direct and indirect support and was counting upon an offensive, of the 3rd Corps at least, against the line Novara-San Martino on the right bank of the Ticino, which he hoped would prevent the enemy from throwing too many troops against him across the river at San Martino and Turbigo.

He was directed, however, from army headquarters not to move too far to the north; the 2nd Corps was ordered to take position at Magenta, the 7th Corps to follow quickly to the same point and the remaining corps (the 3rd, 5th and 8th) received orders to continue the march, three hours after the order to halt (10.15 a.m.).

The retreat across the river had already progressed too far to undertake the offensive with any prospect of success on the right bank of the river, which was already half evacuated.

Hess was too experienced a strategist not to recognize the evils connected with counter-orders issued to so large an army after it had once been put in motion for the day. But the order to halt, which remained in force only three hours, caused practically no important interruption. For the 3rd Corps could not have crossed the bridge at Vigevano at an earlier hour, as the troops of the 7th Corps were passing over the river there. The 5th Corps halted three hours and reached its destination in the evening. The 8th Corps had not yet started, and performed its task for the day between noon and evening.

In the course of the day an engagement took place at Robechetto between a French division, which had crossed at Turbigo and which was supported by a second division, and about 4½ battalions sent against them to reconnoitre. Practically only part of an Austrian rifle battalion was engaged, which was afterwards relieved by another battalion.

The troops were so exhausted from their exertions and want of food, that many swooned from fatigue and some committed suicide.<sup>1</sup>

In the attack isolated sections of riflemen were met by whole French regiments and speedily dispersed. Lieutenant-Field-Marshal Cordon, commanding the reconnaissance, recognizing the superiority of the enemy, retired undisturbed by the latter to Marsallo, 2½ miles north of Magenta.

Urban having learned at 7 a.m. of the passage of the French at Turbigo, marched with two brigades to Gallarate, leaving one brigade at Varese.

Upon the completion of the day's movements the Austrian troops stood as follows :

Those of the 1st Corps which had arrived, and Mengen's half-brigade : north of Magenta from Marsallo to Bernate and thence west of Magenta along the Naviglio Grande from Bernate to the new bridge at Magenta. (Total 12½ battalions.) Some of these troops showed signs of imminent disintegration.

The 2nd Corps having been without food the day before, cooked early on the third in the camp at Soria and began its march to Magenta between 7.30 and 9 a.m. The Cavalry Division in the meantime passing through the 2nd Corps, marched to Magenta and went into camp behind this place at Carbetta. It was followed by the 2nd Corps, which took position on the left of the 1st Corps, facing the Naviglio, and occupied the passages at Ponte Vecchio and Robecco, in front and rear of Magenta.

Reischach's division of the 7th Corps finding the roads occupied until 11 a.m., did not start till then, its head reaching Abbiategrasso at 2 p.m. Here it was met by an order to continue the march to C. Cerella, 2½ miles south-east of Magenta. Lilia's division of the same corps, which followed, had had nothing to eat the day

<sup>1</sup> All this happened with troops which had just arrived from home by rail !

before ; it was halted at Abbiategrasso to cook, but had to march on the same evening to Castelletto, about 7 miles south of Magenta.

The 3rd Corps had assembled at Vigevano and, there finding the bridge occupied, halted to cook ; then it marched one division to Abbiategrasso, the other to Ozero and the vicinity.

After the delay caused by the order to halt, the 5th Corps began to cross the Ticino at Bereguardo at 1 p.m., and reached Fallavecchia between 9 and 12 p.m., detaching one brigade to Montebello, north of Pavia, where it did not arrive until 6 a.m., June 4th.

The 8th Corps started from Trumello at 2 p.m. and, after crossing the Ticino, went into position at Bereguardo ; the rear of the column did not pass the bridge until 3.30 a.m., June 4th.

The 9th Corps assembled its brigades at Piacenza, leaving one only at Stradella.

One of Urban's brigades was, as stated, at Varese, two at Gallarate.

Clam thus had 38½ battalions, 26 squadrons and 136 guns united at Magenta.

6½ miles from this place stood Lilia's division with 8 battalions, 16 guns, and 20 guns of the artillery reserve.

The 3rd Corps stood 7 to 11 miles from there in echelon.

The troops of the 5th Corps, excepting one brigade, were 10½ to 14½ miles from Magenta.

These 2½ army corps therefore could support Clam Gallas on the 4th June in a battle at Magenta.

The 8th Corps with 64 guns of the Artillery Reserve, the 9th Corps and Urban's troops, could not be relied on for action at Magenta on that day.

You may perhaps be surprised that the passage of the allies at Turbigo and San Martino should have caused so much uneasiness in the Austrian army, when it was able to cross at Vigevano and Garlasco, and you may think



that it might have brought up an equal number of troops quite as quickly without exhausting them and making night marches. But this is just one of the principal points of difference between the advance and the retreat. In the former case large numbers of combatants can more quickly cross defiles, because the trains follow them, whereas in the second instance the reverse is the case.

In the evening the following orders were issued from headquarters :

The 8th Corps was to send the Artillery Reserve at once to Rosate (11½ miles from Magenta).

The 9th Corps was to assemble one brigade at Piacenza, one at Pavia (by the 5th June) to guard the Ticino as far as Bereguardo, hold the bridge-head of Vaccarizza with a small force, make preparations for removing the bridge at Piacenza and throwing a second one at Piacenza. The 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 7th Corps were to cook and eat and be ready to march by 8 o'clock a.m. on the 4th June. The head of the 8th Corps was to be at Tainate, the tail at Conigo (in the vicinity of Bereguardo), and to have cooked and eaten and be ready to march at 8 o'clock, leaving one brigade at Bereguardo, and withdrawing the detached brigade at Pavia upon the arrival, on the 5th June, of the brigades of the 9th Corps. The supply trains of the 8th Corps were to be at Pavia, the main ammunition reserve at Pavia and Binasco.

If as it would seem from these arrangements that Gyulai no longer apprehended any attack against Pavia or on the Po thence to Piacenza, for the next few days, especially as he left the trains at Pavia, much that he did will probably be incomprehensible to you, as it is to me. The orders for the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 7th Corps indicate that he expected a decision of considerable importance at Magenta on June 4th. You ask as I do, why were the 3rd and 5th Corps and Lilia's division of the 7th ordered to be ready to march, instead of being ordered to start for the battle-field, since one can never be too strong

for the decisive battle? Might not the battle of Magenta last two days, and was it not necessary in this case to have telegraphed for Urban's three brigades and the 8th Corps to start early on the 4th, so that these troops might reach the battle-field on the 5th without undue exertion? Why were not as many troops of the 9th Corps as could be collected north of the Po, ordered to march as far as possible in the direction of Magenta? Why was the 8th Corps to leave a brigade at Bereguardo and one at Pavia, the 9th Corps one at Stradella, one at Piacenza, and to send one to Pavia, thus depriving the army for the next few days of the assistance of five brigades, i.e. a whole army corps, in order to watch a country where there was no enemy, and which might have been watched just as well by a few squadrons of cavalry? To all these questions I can make no answer, and I reserve the possible explanation until we come to the general discussion of these operations.

4TH JUNE.—The night preceding the battle of Magenta was quiet.

At 7 a.m. the outposts reported that large bodies of the enemy were assembling at San Martino; Gyulai received this information at 8 a.m. Clam in the meantime concentrated his troops and sent those exhausted by hardships and want of subsistence back to Magenta. Cavalry was sent towards Turbigo to reconnoitre.

At 9.15 a.m. the troops reported from Bernate, the northernmost point held along the Naviglio, that the enemy was advancing in great force from Turbigo. The 2nd Corps therefore sent one brigade to Buffalora.

At 9.45 a.m. Clam reported to Gyulai (the report arrived at 10.30 a.m.) that large forces of the enemy were assembling in front of San Martino, but that he did not seem to be advancing in force from Turbigo. Gyulai then ordered Reischach's division (11 a.m.) to march through Corbetta to Magenta, reporting there to Clam, who was ordered to attack the troops which had crossed at Turbigo,

with Cordon's and Reischach's divisions, and drive them back.

In the meantime, however, the enemy had passed the bridge at San Martino, pushed the Austrian outposts back upon the Naviglio, and an attack on the latter was to be expected at any moment. Thus it was no longer possible to send these two divisions against Turbigo.

Gyulai wrote to Urban that he had ordered an attack on Turbigo to-day and that he (Urban) should take this enemy in flank to-morrow, June 5th, and direct his movements to-day accordingly.

This letter was received by Urban on June 19th! I cannot omit to call your attention to the importance, for strategy as well as tactics, of taking care so to transmit orders that they may be sure to arrive. You ridiculed the idea, when on a former occasion I argued, against single batteries being habitually attached to infantry brigades, that they never received their proper orders in time, because the brigade adjutant had to ride on a different road, and if the battery commander were to ride with the brigade commander, the trumpeter's horse would soon be tired out. You told me I limited my tactical ideas by my notions as to the capability of a trumpeter's horse.

Clam reported the state of affairs to army headquarters at 11.45 a.m., and at the same time requested, in writing, the 3rd and 7th Corps and Reischach's division to accelerate their march to the battle-field.

At 12.45 p.m. Gyulai ordered the 7th Corps to march to Corbetta, Reischach's division to be posted behind the 2nd Corps at Magenta, the 3rd Corps to march to Robecco, attacking the enemy's right flank, the 5th Corps to march to Abbiategrasso, taking position in front of that place toward Lugagnano and Robecco, the 8th to advance through Gaggiano. The Artillery Reserve was also ordered up.

These very appropriate orders (issued, however, twelve

hours too late) prove that Gyulai was expecting the battle to continue on June 5th. For the 8th, and a large portion of the 5th Corps, could not take part in a battle on the 4th. One hour must certainly elapse before the arrival of the order, and you know that the 5th Corps was more than 14 miles from Magenta, and the 8th Corps still further. One brigade only of the 5th Corps actually came into action on the evening, for it did not start for Robecco until after 3 p.m.

As we are reviewing the strategical measures only, a discussion of the tactical events of the battle is out of place. I will only mention that the Austrian troops, so far as concerns individual leading and bravery, fought splendidly. Only a few companies are charged by the Official Account (p. 528) with showing weakness at the appearance of superior forces of the enemy. It seems they belonged to those troops which had suffered from the hardships and privations of the preceding days to such an extent that the part they took in the action may be neglected (note the strategical importance of feeding troops).

In general, the course of the battle was, that the Austrian troops of the 1st and 2nd Corps along the Naviglio Grande on a line from Ponte Vecchio to Ponte Nuovo and Buffalora offered to the superior enemy an obstinate resistance on the front to the west, and even placed him in a critical position. Towards the north also they contained for a long time MacMahon's forces which were advancing from Turbigo.

At the moment when the loss of the Naviglio Grande seemed unavoidable, Reischach's division of the 7th Corps, charging with unsurpassed devotion, restored the battle.

The advance of the 3rd Corps from the south on both sides of the Naviglio against the enemy's right flank, brought those troops of the latter which had crossed at San Martino again within measurable distance of a great

catastrophe, while successfully repulsing the attacks which were then being made from the north against Magenta itself.

At last, towards evening, MacMahon succeeded in completing the deployment of 5 divisions (3 French, 2 Piedmontese) from Turbigo, i.e. from the north, against the line Buffalora-Magenta, and assailed the right flank of the Austrians with overwhelming superiority. Their exhausted troops being driven from Buffalora by flank and rear attacks, the passage of the Naviglio was definitely opened for the French who had crossed at San Martino, and Magenta itself, simultaneously attacked from north and west, was finally lost (toward 8 p.m.) in spite of the most heroic effort of the Austrian troops, which had become much intermixed and were therefore hard to direct.

Retiring southward, they rallied late in the evening on the leading brigade of the 5th Corps.

During the night the troops of the 1st, 2nd and 7th Corps, under Clam, with ranks much thinned and disorganized, were at Corbetta and retreating upon Cisliano.

The 3rd Corps retired only as far as Carpenzago, the major part of the 5th Corps stood behind it at Robecco and Castellazzo dei Barzi. The 8th Corps had arrived near Corbetta to support the 1st, 2nd and 7th Corps. Thus the Austrian army stood on the line Corbetta-Castellazzo-Carpenzago, about a mile from the line Magenta-Ponte di Magenta, facing north, with  $2\frac{1}{2}$  army corps of fresh troops (8th, 5th and Lilia's division of the 7th Corps) ready to resume the battle on June 5th. Orders to that effect were accordingly issued, but Clam reported that the troops of the 1st and 2nd Corps and Reischach's division were no longer equal to it.

The enemy did not pursue. He was himself so much shaken that he halted for 24 hours, "pour réorganiser l'armée," as the bulletin had it.

The official account contains an interesting summation of the numbers engaged, from which it appears that of the

Austrian army 58,183 infantry and 3435 cavalry had been engaged at Magenta, and that 75,187 infantry and 2963 cavalry had not been engaged. Urban's troops, 10,000 to 11,000 strong, are not included in the latter. If we wish to calculate with what force Gyulai might have resumed the battle on June 5th, we must deduct the whole of the 9th and (one brigade of the) 8th Corps which could not have come up in time. Gyulai, therefore, had nearly 50,000 fresh troops available with which to continue the struggle on the 5th June. Had Urban been ordered by telegraph early on the 4th to advance on the same day toward the battle-field, he might have reached it in time on the 5th, and then there would have been nearly 60,000 fresh troops available early on that day to resume the battle, not counting the 3rd Corps nor the brigade of the 5th Corps which had been engaged, nor Clam's troops.

It is too late now to decide whether Clam was right in reporting his troops unfit for another battle on the 5th June, and whether it would have been better for Gyulai to have fought again, rather than to have ordered the retreat. One thing is certain, the allies were nearly as much shaken as the Austrians.

## TWELFTH LETTER.

### COMMENTS.

To deduce the proper lessons from the strategical measures of the Austrian Commander-in-Chief from the beginning of the campaign to the 4th June, you must permit me to summarize the events from the point of view of the Austrians.

The Austrian ultimatum of April 19th was delivered at Turin on April 23rd. On the 26th April a negative answer was returned, on the 27th April Gyulai was ordered to cross the Ticino, and on the 30th April he crossed it, advancing in three days in the direction of Turin as far as the Sesia, where the leading troops of his corps stood on the evening of the 2nd May.

On the 3rd May, he suddenly turned to the left (south), made a not very serious attempt to cross the Po at Valenza and Bassignana, and directed the 8th Corps to throw a bridge over the Po farther back at Cornale and cross over the next day. He ordered two other corps to be in readiness to support it, ordering them, however, at the same time to move on the 25th May to the line Novara-Vercelli, one day's march farther to the north. A flood destroyed the bridge on the 5th, and the situation of the 8th Corps was considered dangerous. The other corps therefore remained in the vicinity, although, separated as they were by the Po, they were unable to give assistance. On the 6th May the 8th Corps was precipitately withdrawn from beyond the river by the

bridge, which had been repaired, and a bridge was thrown at Vaccarizza, below the mouth of the Ticino.

On the 7th May the offensive toward the west against Turin was again contemplated and prepared by a general movement of the army to the right. On the 8th, three corps crossed the Sesia, the others advanced to that river, and on the 9th the army was put in motion to advance to the Dora Baltea, but this movement, although, or perhaps because, no enemy was met, was given up and changed into a retreat. This retreat across the Sesia was completed on the 10th May, in part by exhausting forced marches, which rendered imperative a rest on the 11th. On the 12th May the army took up a more extensive and commodious defensive position in the Lomellina, a sort of central position, with advanced troops forming a quarter of a circle on the line of the Sesia and Po from Vercelli to the mouth of the Ticino.

On the 14th, 15th and 16th May the army remained practically quiet. Only Urban with his three brigades scouted south of the Po, and the first brigade of the 9th Corps, part of the expected reinforcements, arrived at Piacenza on the 16th, followed soon after by the remaining brigades.

News of the arrival of hostile troops at Bobbio in the Apennines, and of indications on the part of the enemy of his intention to cross the river, now caused Gyulai to conceive the idea that the enemy would advance south of the Po against Piacenza, threatening his retreat into the quadrilateral, at the same time attacking him in front. To this opinion he adhered until the 1st June. Accordingly the reserves behind the front were moved to the left rear, Vercelli was evacuated on the 19th, in order not to weaken the army by too extensive a front, and a reconnaissance in force made south of the Po. The fact that these forces (consisting of detachments from four different army corps) met, when advancing from Piacenza and the bridge-head of Vaccarizza, with serious resistance



at Montebello on May 20th, confirmed Gyulai in his opinion and caused him to consider all reports of the appearance of the enemy in force at Vercelli as exaggerated.

Garibaldi, however, seeing Vercelli and the northern passages over the Sesia denuded of Austrian troops, moved into the Alps against the right flank and rear of the Austrian army to the region of Ticino and beyond, and formed the nucleus for an insurrection which was now organized to the north of Milan. In consequence of the exaggerated reports of Garibaldi's strength, Urban was directed to move with all of his three brigades to the vicinity of Como and Varese, without, however, being able to overcome the bold leader with his 3000 mountaineer riflemen.

Up to the 25th May, the enemy harassed the Austrian army by demonstrations along the entire front. Gyulai attached the least importance to those about Vercelli, and even censured the measures taken by the 7th Corps. But the enemy resolved on the 26th May upon taking the route which Garibaldi's advance had proved to be unobstructed, and the next day the main body began to march off by the left flank, close in front of the Austrian position and separated from it only by the water-line, to Vercelli, which was held by some Piedmontese divisions.

The Austrian commander did not realize these movements, because he disbelieved the reports and clung to the idea that his left flank was threatened. Even when, on the 30th, the enemy pushed forward several divisions from Vercelli across the Sesia against Palestro, he believed it to be a mere demonstration, and ordered quite insufficient reinforcements from the reserve to the 7th Corps. The attempt to retake Palestro on the 31st May was frustrated by the enemy's superiority; but Gyulai still believed that with 2½ corps he would be able to drive him back over the Sesia on the 1st June. The reports received during the night, however, seem to have con-

vinced him that the greater part of the enemy's army was already between Novara and Vercelli.

This sudden change of opinion caused the fatal measures of the 1st and 2nd June. Gyulai seems to have hesitated between crossing the Ticino and meeting the enemy at Magenta (where, in the meantime, parts of the 1st Corps had begun to arrive) or attacking the enemy at Novara from the south (like Radetzky in 1849). The many different orders issued during the day indicate this lack of resolution. What was eventually done amounted to nought, one corps being directed to the north to guard against an attack from Novara, the remaining troops being moved to and fro, or held in readiness to march.

The hesitation in the plans of the Commander-in-Chief seems to have continued for some time on the 2nd June, for orders to retreat and to re-occupy positions just abandoned, succeeded one another. Retreat was finally decided upon and the army reached the Ticino during the night, fatigued and exhausted.

The movements on the 3rd June were interrupted by the arrival of Hess from Vienna, who contemplated taking the offensive against Novara, but eventually continued the retreat thinking it too late to advance. Nothing remained but to unite the army as soon as possible at Magenta, to guard the road Novara-Milan, and there to oppose the enemy's advance. Great speed was now imperative, for the enemy was marching along the chord of the arc on which the Austrians were moving. Yet many of the corps were not put in motion at once, but merely kept in readiness to march, even up to the afternoon of the 4th June, when they received their final orders.

Many troops were left detached in directions in which there was no enemy of any strength.

Thus it came about that the part of the army present at the battle of Magenta was finally driven back by the superior numbers of the enemy, some five to seven miles.

You will admit that it is difficult in discussing of all these strategical arrangements to understand their object. Nowhere does the truth of the saying, "*Difficile est satiram non scribere*," apply more strongly than here. For this reason you will perhaps, like myself, find it natural that even the Austrian Official Account, in spite of its striving only to give a mere statement of what happened, is in some instances carried by patriotism into very bitter criticism.

We, however, who are impartial and do not desire to criticize, but merely to investigate and learn, must confine ourselves to fathoming the causes of those points which seem unusual.

It is true, it was impossible to have played more into the enemy's hand than was actually done, spending five precious weeks, from the 27th April to the 1st June, in busy inaction, in fatiguing useless marches, and giving the enemy time to bring up reinforcements, gain the superiority and the active initiative. The idea of treason and collusion with the enemy on the part of Gyulai is out of the question. Therefore you will no doubt simply tell me that he was not qualified for the command of an army. But that does not serve our purpose. We must try to learn what qualities he was lacking in, and what other factors may have influenced his plans.

It is therefore necessary to speak of his personality. I met him when staying at Milan in 1855, and heard a good deal of what they thought about him in the army. He was of an aristocratic and distinguished appearance, high-minded both in thought and deed, a good drill, stern and just, more respected than loved, yet not unpopular. I heard it said that he was somewhat stubborn, also that he knew the details of regimental administration and the drill books, better than their practical application in the field or to strategy. An absolute want of capacity on his part I never heard mentioned. He was highly respected and had acquitted himself with distinction in all positions up to

and including that of commanding an army corps. That he should suddenly have become old was never suggested then nor later on.

In 1851 it was therefore the opinion, not only in official circles in Vienna, but also among the officers of the army, that he would be *the* man to carry on the war with energy, provided he had an able chief of staff. At the beginning of May, 1859, when the operations had already begun, Austrian officers at Ancona, whom I knew, unanimously expressed themselves to that effect, when I betrayed some impatience at the slowness of the operations. I could not dispute the possibility of a favourable result from such a combination. For, was our celebrated Blucher a strategist or a learned man? Personal bravery, which encouraged the most timid around him, without fear of responsibility, an indestructible energy, and a good deal of stubbornness, were Blucher's main traits. To plan the attack—which Blucher never failed to insist upon making—was the duty of his friend Gneisnau, while Muffling worked out the details.

Gyulai's Chief of the Staff, Colonel von Kuhn, was, above all the officers of the army of his length of service, the one who enjoyed the highest reputation for being an energetic active man, able and full of ardour. Having never met him myself, I cannot express a personal opinion of him, but several much higher positions in which he afterward acquitted himself with credit, prove it. For a happy composition of army headquarters there was but one thing more necessary, viz. for Gyulai to be in harmony with his chief staff officer upon the principal questions and to repose implicit confidence in him.

I have never heard anything about the inner life of the headquarters, some facts, however, seem to point out that this harmony and confidence did not exist. From the repeated counter-orders which consumed the strength of the army without applying it upon the enemy, it is clear that there were two currents at headquarters, one in favour

of the offensive, the other in favour of the defensive. But we know that Gyulai believed the army too weak from the beginning to undertake the offensive with success, that he expressed himself to that effect to the Emperor as early as the 25th April, that he had ever a leaning toward the defensive, and that he constantly gravitated toward the position which he believed most favourable for maintaining himself in Italy—the Quadrilateral between the Mincio and Adige. Therefore I presume that to Kuhn was due the other current, which also was more in accord with him, as the younger, more active, energetic man. Supposing such to have been the case, the counter-orders and inconsistencies can be explained, and therefore I believe that it was so.<sup>1</sup>

When, at the opening of the campaign, the army had crossed the Lomellina and reached the line Sesia-Po, the fortified bridge over the Po at Valenza might easily have been taken by surprise. The opportunity was allowed to slip. Since the army corps which was on the spot reported the case, it seems certain that no censure followed the omission, and it may even have been that the circumspect Gyulai himself gave the order not to do so. In discussing the matter, however, the chief of staff carried his point, and orders were issued to make an attempt on the bridge at Valenza, and to throw another at Bassignana. The corps commander perhaps received from these two men different intimations as to the purpose of the enterprise against the bridge. The Official Account only states that he asked whether he was to destroy or use the bridge. Gyulai, who believed himself too weak when crossing the Ticino, must have been still more averse to cross the Po also. In reply to the question he called the attempt on

<sup>1</sup> The work published by the Prussian General Staff on the war in Italy in 1859 does not express this idea in so many words, but the fact that in the beginning of the work the necessity of a homogeneous composition of headquarters is discussed in detail, gives an impression to that effect. This book is believed to be very largely the composition of Field-Marshal v. Moltke.—E.D.

the bridge only a demonstration and directed it to be blown up.

The chief of the staff now maintained that it was high time to attack and defeat the Piedmontese army in its position at San Salvatore, before it could be reinforced by considerable French forces, and succeeded with difficulty in having the 8th Corps ordered to throw a bridge across at Cornale on the 4th May. I think that the idea of the left flank of the army being more effectually covered, if for its advance upon Turin it used the road Novara-Vercelli, was but a pretext. Kuhn was secretly hoping that the corps would become embroiled with the enemy and would then need assistance from the two other corps, and that thus a decisive battle might be brought on. Otherwise there would be no sense in leaving three-fifths of the entire strength south, to cover the army during the change to the northern road. The flood of the 5th May showed the danger to which the corps was exposed on the further bank. Gyulai therefore withdrew it at once on the 6th May, and as the chief of the staff insisted upon an offensive movement of some sort, that toward the west upon Turin was agreed on. For the slow advance across the Sesia on 7th and 8th May bears on its face the stamp of a compromise. But when the leading troops of the army reached the Dora Baltea, Gyulai again became uneasy for his line of retreat on the Quadrilateral, all the more because he found no enemy in his front. The hostile army must be somewhere. What would happen if the enemy, in the meantime, advanced south of the Po, and cut him off from the Mincio, while he was marching upon Turin? Then he seems to have appreciated the fact that the possession of the enemy's capital only enables peace to be dictated when the hostile army has previously been destroyed. Counter-orders were given on the 9th May. Was the chief of the staff absent when they were issued, and did he on his return succeed in stopping them, while at last Gyulai insisted on carrying out his own plan? The Official

Account is silent on this point, but I cannot explain otherwise the various contradictory and inconsistent instructions which caused the luckless troops to march and counter-march on that day, until quite exhausted.

From the 10th May, Gyulai held a central position in the Lomellina, where he believed himself safe. Another army corps, the 9th, arrived at Piacenza and covered his left flank at a point where the enemy even with greatly superior forces would not be able to force the narrow defile of Stradella, before he, Gyulai, could take him in flank and rear with his main forces from Vaccarizza. An advance across the line of the Sesia and Po, he thought he could easily repulse with his united forces, and if the enemy tried to turn his flank by the north, he would do so at the risk of being taken in flank and driven into the Alps.

The idea of occupying a central position to defend a river-line is not objectionable in itself, if the intention be to attack with united forces and crush those of the enemy's troops that have crossed. Clausewitz calls this plan the indirect defence of a river. But in connection therewith he demands a direct defence in order to be able to distinguish at once serious attempts at crossing from mere demonstrations. Furthermore, the central position must be so near to all possible points of crossing, that they can be reached before the enemy has crossed with all his forces, i.e. in 24 hours.

But for the sake of making the reconnaissance in force which led to the engagement at Montebello on the 20th May, the direct defence of the river-line was abandoned at Vercelli to avoid scattering the army too much. What is the position these two men took regarding that operation? The employment of forces insufficient for a decisive action again suggests that the whole enterprise was the result of a compromise. Gyulai thought it necessary in order to clear up matters in this direction, because he had become steeped in the idea that the

greatest danger was from that quarter, i.e. the south. Kuhn consented in order that something might be done and the time not be spent in inactivity.

I have already brought to your notice that in the resistance encountered at Montebello, Gyulai was confirmed in his erroneous idea. He retired to the central defensive position in the Lomellina, believing himself safe there, and he moved the bulk of his forces nearer to the left wing, withdrawing it more and more from Vercelli, and neglecting that section of country.

In the meantime the enemy seized the open defile at Vercelli, and became convinced by Garibaldi's successful advance that it would be easier to assume the offensive there than south of the Po, or than to pass the river in the face of the Austrian army. Four Piedmontese divisions were therefore directed to this point, the rest of the army following in the same direction on the 27th May.

Gyulai, still clinging to the opinion he had formed, believed everything reported from Vercelli to be mere demonstrations made to deceive him. Here for the first time we find in the Official Account an allusion to a difference of opinion between the two men, as I have already said. It is expressly stated that Colonel von Kuhn had made a calculation as to the enemy's probable strength at Vercelli from the reports of spies and patrols, and that when Gyulai ordered Lieutenant-Field-Marshal Zobel on the 31st May to drive the enemy back over the Sesia at Palestro with two divisions, Kuhn, in explanation, enjoined caution upon Zobel, lest the enemy were too strong for him.

It may now appear incomprehensible that Gyulai should have rejected Kuhn's opinion, which later events have proved right. But I must tell you, that in war nothing is more difficult than to select the correct report from many conflicting ones. All men have not the luck and skill to see through the veil which hinders the vision. I had the opportunity once of admiring the composure and



penetration of an army commander under whom I had the good fortune to serve. Upon receiving a very alarming report, he said to the chief of the staff: "The man who brought this report was much excited. Before we believe it, let us wait until some calm man confirms it." And sure enough the man who had brought the report had been dreaming, as the saying is.

Even the greatest and most experienced commanders have been thus deceived. Several historians state that the great king on one occasion only believed one spy (who was in the enemy's pay) and angrily rejected all reports conflicting with that man's statements, thus enabling the enemy to surprise him at Hochkirch. And did not Napoleon I., the master of modern war, believe for several days, in 1814, that he was drawing on the whole hostile army, when he was deceived by a screen of cavalry, which cost him his capital and his crown?

But still every commander should cling with more or less stubbornness to an idea once formed, if he does not wish to have his arrangements disturbed by every conflicting report; in which case he would accomplish nothing.

The reports of spies are never of much value when the forces are moving. The spy must steal through the armies by circuitous routes, losing much time, and thus he can only report what has happened several days before. Add to this that rarely any but venal subjects lend themselves to the business of a spy and usually manage to get into the pay of both parties. Only the reports of patrols are really reliable.

Perhaps you find it incomprehensible that Gyulai kept his cavalry division almost invariably in reserve in rear of the army instead of using it in front for reconnoitring purposes, as we did in 1870. Yes, but now that 1870 is passed it is easy to talk. Did we use our cavalry in 1866 on this principle from the beginning? Did not in both armies the principle still prevail of keeping the main

body of the cavalry in reserve and saving it for a great charge? Did we not change our practice in this respect only during the campaign and after the experiences of 1866?

It is true, Gyulai was not very well served by the few squadrons which were in advance, and it cannot be denied that his order adding infantry to the cavalry patrols must have had a crippling effect upon reconnaissance. But even this idea, although involving pernicious consequences, admits of a psychological explanation. That an imperial hussar should be killed by peasants with pitchforks, affected his proud military spirit like an insult. At any rate he would save his hussars from them. Do not laugh at him! We have seen similar things amongst ourselves when long peace had made us forget the practice of war. I remember in my first campaign, how a commander considered it as an insult to his regiment that one of his officers, who, while boldly reconnoitring, had advanced too far, was captured by the enemy. The commander, leaving his regiment where it was, rushed off to army headquarters with a long face to personally report the case. I remember the general grief when, in an engagement before the entrenchments of Düppel, a platoon of infantry was cut off, and we observed with glasses the enemy's exultation when the captured officer, in a stunned condition, was carried into the enemy's entrenchments. This exultation was considered an insult to our army. It was our late Prince Frederick Charles who at once put down such notions, saying: "It does not matter, we shall lose more officers yet," and invariably praised and rewarded boldness, even if it were imprudent and resulted in loss.

Gyulai, it is true, did not display that quality of mind which at once chooses the right from among a number of wrong ideas. He allowed himself to be influenced by the opinions generally held, and which in such situations, especially at the opening of a campaign, affect the general view.

The Official Account mentions some heroic work of the reconnoitring cavalry. I will only mention the case of Lieutenant Baldissera, who, with a troop of hussars, swam across the Sesia close in front of the enemy's army encamped there. But such action was rather the exception than the rule, and was in violation of general orders.

We have seen that during the night preceding the 1st June, after the second engagement at Palestro, Gyulai became aware that the troops in his front were the enemy's main body which had crossed at Vercelli. The orders issued on that date, which hesitated between retiring or staying, and which eventually kept the army in its previous position, again indicate a conflict of views at headquarters, and I am inclined to believe that while Gyulai wished to retreat and to take up a position behind the Mincio, Kuhn, who desired at any rate to do *something*, preferred a decision on the further bank of the Ticino.

On the 2nd June neither could help inferring from the enemy's failure to attack, that he was advancing on Milan through San Martino and Magenta, and must be in the vicinity of Novara. What is more natural than for Kuhn to desire to attack the enemy in flank from the south when in motion, while Gyulai wished to retire behind the Ticino and oppose the enemy at Magenta, thus keeping open his line of retreat to the Mincio? Only by this conflict of opinions can we explain the different orders which on this day exhausted the troops and finally took them behind the Ticino.

But it seems that even on the 3rd June Gyulai did not seriously contemplate opposing the enemy at Magenta. He may still have been thinking about a retreat behind the Mincio, otherwise he would not have left so many troops detached to guard districts which were not threatened, while Hess and Kuhn both urged a decision at Magenta.

These repeated conflicts of opinion gave rise to

half-measures which eventually led to the loss of the battle.

The account which I have given of the history of events at headquarters is, of course, mere conjecture. But only by such suppositions do the measures adopted admit of explanation. If I picture to myself the conduct of affairs at headquarters, I can see in my mind Kuhn's remonstrances, Gyulai's temporary yielding, his counter-orders, no doubt given in Kuhn's absence, the lively disputes ensuing therefrom, so plainly that I am willing to bet that it was as I suppose.

What do we learn from this? That there must be unanimity at headquarters, i.e. that the Commander-in-Chief must be in harmony with his chief staff officer. They must be selected so that they will run well together. This does not matter to you or me, for we shall probably never belong to the headquarters of an army.

Another point has to be considered. For you will probably tell me that Kuhn, being the subordinate, should have been the first to yield and agree to Gyulai's idea. But supposing Kuhn represented the ideas of His Majesty the Emperor? There are several indications that this was the case.

The ultimatum dated April 19th, which was delayed by diplomatic negotiations on the part of England, was delivered at Turin on the 23rd April, and called for a reply from the Sardinian Government within three days. It is inconceivable that Gyulai should have had no knowledge of it. On the 25th April, i.e. during this time, Gyulai sent a memorial to Vienna, in which he tried to demonstrate that his forces were too small to successfully take the offensive. We do not know accurately what information as to the enemy's actual condition the Emperor and Gyulai possessed. But we can easily infer what the effect would have been if Gyulai had carried out the Emperor's intentions in spirit and in deed.

In that case he would have used the three days granted

to the enemy to get his army ready for an immediate offensive, and would have begun operations with the greatest possible force the moment he received the order.

You may ask me for the plan of operation which he ought to have followed. Well, the only correct plan of operation always is to reach the enemy's forces with the greatest possible rapidity and with united strength. This requires a position admitting of the most rapid possible advance (i.e. broad front affording many roads) and of quick concentration for the decisive battle (which again reduces the front). Such a position must be directly in front of the country upon which the army is based, in order that supplies may be forthcoming with regularity and some degree of certainty. This is called the strategical deployment, from which the start is made, the enemy sought for and action taken according to circumstances.

Let us suppose the strategical deployment of the army from Turbigo to Pavia (a front of  $28\frac{1}{2}$  miles) to be completed by the 26th April and one corps posted each at Turbigo, Buffalora, Vigevano, Bereguardo and Pavia. On the 27th the order would arrive to cross the frontier. The army has had a day's rest on the 27th and could begin its advance in the direction of the river-line Vercelli-Pieve del Cairo not later than the early morning of the 28th. We have seen above that on June 2nd the Austrian troops accomplished the retreat from the Sesia to the Ticino in one day, though much delayed by the columns crossing, and not without being exhausted. But as the advance would not have been delayed by the enemy, it could have been accomplished in two days, the army reaching the river-line above referred to by noon on the 29th April.

We have also seen that the army corps reported on the 3rd May that it might easily have taken the bridge at Valenza by surprise. Four days earlier it would have been still easier. In the afternoon of the 29th April,

therefore, it would have been in the hands of the Austrians. On the evening of that day it would have been necessary to decide in which direction to continue the offensive. Patrols pushed to the front would have reported the enemy's forces concentrated in the position of San Salvatore. There would then have been the choice between a continuing of the movement upon Turin or crossing to the south of the Po to strike the enemy at San Salvatore. A continuation of the movement upon Turin would have left the enemy's main body intact on the left flank and eventually in the rear, and was therefore easily affected by the slightest pressure from that direction. Therefore the enemy's main body would have been selected as the object.

On the 30th April the passage of the Po might have begun by the permanent bridge at Valenza and by a second (pontoon) bridge in the vicinity. With proper care one army corps could cross by each bridge daily, and at the end of May four army corps would have been available for the attack upon the position of San Salvatore, while the corps in reserve was passing the bridges. As a protection in the direction of Turin, cavalry would have scouted beyond the Sesia as far as the Dora Baltea.

What force could the enemy have had at San Salvatore on the 2nd May?

The Sardinian army (headquarters at San Salvatore, 1st Division at Occimiano and Valenza, 2nd and 3rd Divisions at Alessandria, 4th division at Ponte Stura, 5th Division at Frassinetto, Valenza, Bassignana) numbered on paper, when mobilized, about 80,000 combatant field troops. But we have seen that as late as the 20th May it had not more than five divisions of 10,000 each, total 50,000 men available, although preparations for war had been begun in the middle of February. They were still incomplete then, and the strength just stated would probably have been the highest that could have been encountered on the 2nd May, or perhaps not more than 40,000 field troops.

At any rate, Garibaldi's volunteers were not as well organized in the first as they were in the last days of May. In addition to this there was in the Austrian army a feeling of superiority over the young Sardinian army, even with equal numbers, dating from the wars of 1848 and 1849.

The next question is : how many French troops could have arrived in the vicinity of San Salvatore in support of the Sardinian army by the 2nd May ?

The I. Corps, with the II. following and the Guards bringing up the rear, was struggling in the passes of the Appenines from Genoa to Serravalle, whence the head of the column was about to issue from the mountains. The II. Corps and the Guards were massed around Genoa. The III. Corps had pushed one division to Alessandria, the leading brigade of the rest of the corps, which was still defiling over the Mont Cenis pass under great difficulties, was at Susa. As to the whereabouts of the IV. Corps at the time, the French accounts are silent. It reached Alessandria on the 7th May, and might, therefore, have defiled over the Mont Cenis behind the III. Corps, or in advance of it, and been assembled at Turin by the 2nd May. Even supposing the latter to be the case, only one division of the III. Corps and such isolated battalions from Serravalle, Susa and Turin as could be despatched by rail would have been available at San Salvatore on the 2nd May, and the capacity of the railways was small. Hence the French supports could not at the best have amounted to more than two divisions, i.e. half an army corps. The Austrian army could have attacked with at least 100,000 men. Success was thus more than probable.

We will not give further play to our imagination as to what might have been done after defeating the enemy at San Salvatore, how the Austrian army would have had an opportunity of falling with united forces upon the enemy debouching from the Appenines at Serravalle, or from the

Alps at Susa, and compelling him to seek a junction somewhere else, and where ?<sup>1</sup>

In making these statements, I disclaim any desire of appearing wiser than the Austrian headquarters, which could not then know the whereabouts of the different parts of the enemy's army as we do now. The purpose of the above exposition is only to demonstrate that the idea of the Emperor had the better prospect of success.

We see from this that Gyulai was mistaken about the politico-strategical position. You will probably say that he only had in view the success of his monarch. That is beyond a doubt, but because to err is human and no man is exempt from it, the Commander-in-Chief must subordinate his views to those of the monarch, not only so far as required by obedience, as Gyulai did, for he crossed the Ticino and opened the campaign because he was ordered to, but he must also so go in for the ideas of his monarch as to make them his own.

In this case they required a quick and energetic offensive, to which Gyulai could not make up his mind. More information comes to the monarch, both political and military, than comes to the commander in the field ; the former, therefore, must be better informed. Nor can the politics of the monarch be successful unless the strategy of his general be in harmony with it. As Blume says : " Success in war depends essentially upon whether or not the several organizations charged with the care of political and military interests stand in harmonious relations to one another."

You may also say that the obedience of a Commander-in-Chief of an army must differ from that of a lieutenant, who has to obey the word of command of his superior mechanically. There you certainly are right. He must think and act for himself in executing his monarch's

<sup>1</sup> I have not considered an Austrian offensive south of the Po from Piacenza. It had many chances in its favour. But it does not appear from the Official Account whether or not Gyulai knew of the incomplete state of the fortifications of Alessandria.



plans. And when he is not perfectly certain that he can so think and act, or when he feels that his views are diametrically opposed to those of his sovereign? Well, then for this occasion he cannot act as Commander-in-Chief. He had better request the monarch to entrust the command to someone who will adopt the latter's views. I allow that this may be a hard resolution to take at a moment when the country is in danger. But loyalty to his monarch and love of country must tell him that a partial co-operation with the political views pursued is detrimental, that he must keep in view the whole, and restrain the voice of personal vanity and ambition. Some, in like cases, are said to have subdued themselves to that extent.<sup>1</sup>

Again and again we see that this fear of having his line of retreat to the Quadrilateral endangered, checked Gyulai's activity, although almost invariably he used more than half his army to cover his flank and rear. Thus, up to the 6th May, the attempts at crossing the Po, which were never really seriously contemplated, become mere demonstrations. Up to the 9th May he barely brought three army corps over the Sesia for the offensive against the Dora Baltea. In the engagement at Montebello the small portion of the army engaged was not supported by the forces in the vicinity. On the third day, the 1st June, not more than two and one half army corps were brought against the enemy's principal advance over the Sesia at Vercelli and Palestro. In the decisive battle of Magenta not quite one half of the troops under Gyulai's command were engaged.

Therefore, my dear friend, should you ever in the future course of your career gain the highest rung of the ladder—which I hope you will, with all my heart—and obtain the command of an army, adopt fully and

<sup>1</sup> He must say to himself that he will not gain in honour and glory if he performs his task reluctantly. For such a course invariably leads to half measures, as it did in the campaign under discussion.

wholly the politico-strategical views of your sovereign. If you cannot do so, you had better request that the honour be conferred upon someone else. This is the principal, practical lesson which I wish to deduce from the disastrous consequences of Gyulai's strategical measures.

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The other lessons we may learn from the general strategical measures of the commander of the Austrian army from the 30th April to the 4th June, 1859, I have already discussed or touched upon. Thus, Gyulai's continual hankering after the defensive position within the historic Quadrilateral show how hazardous it is to keep a definite plan of operation constantly in mind, however excellent it may be. For circumstances alter cases. What to-day is most excellent strategically, may be entirely wrong to-morrow. Hence, Napoleon I.'s celebrated saying: "*Je n'ai jamais eu un plan d'opération.*" The main thing is that the strategical deployment of the army be properly carried out; after that, it depends upon circumstances, i.e. the position and strength of the enemy's main forces, what should be done in order to be superior in the decisive battle and secure the advantage of the initiative. Thus, dispositions, plans and speculations made before the beginning of the war and aiming beyond the strategical deployment, will mostly turn out to be idle and fruitless dreams of fancy. They may become harmful if they hamper the judgment and impede the initiative. In this instance they led Gyulai into employing too many troops for covering purposes, thus keeping them from the battle-field. But this I have already mentioned.

There remain only a few remarks to make about "protection and connection." These two words are frequently wrongly understood, both tactically and strategically. There are cases when an infantry brigade is totally inadequate as a covering force, and other cases in which a cavalry patrol is more suitable than an infantry brigade, for

it depends upon what is to be guarded against. To avoid endless speculation I will mention examples. For covering the passage of the Ticino at San Martino all the force which Clam could send there proved inadequate. He therefore evacuated the bridge-head. For guarding the line of the Po from Pavia to Piacenza on the 3rd June, the whole 9th Corps with one brigade of the 8th Corps was far too much. A few squadrons would have sufficed. For in the former case the covering troops might possibly be called upon to engage superior forces, in the latter they were only to get information.

The same reasoning applies to keeping up communications. Cases may well be imagined in which a whole army corps does not suffice to connect the two wings of a defensive position.<sup>1</sup> But there are also cases where patrols suffice, and others in which no troops are needed at all to keep connection between forces.

In the battles of St. Privat and Sedan the 12th and Guard Corps were required to keep up communication with each other. For this purpose each corps commander sent to the other one of his staff officers with some orderlies. This officer's sole duty was to keep his own corps commander informed of what the other was contemplating, arranging or executing, and at what hour and minute he had reached this or that point.

For both purposes, protection and connection, as few troops as possible must be employed in order to have the greatest number available for the decisive battle.

To what I have already stated about a central strategical position for the defence of a river-line, or rather to what Clausewitz has so correctly stated in this respect, it only remains to add the remark that it has all the disadvantages of every rigid defensive, because it gives up the advantages of the initiative. It should therefore always be resorted to with reluctance and for a short time only. I should think that Gyulai's defensive position in the Lomellina was not

<sup>1</sup> For instance, Solferino.

objectionable. But I should not consent to it if it was his intention to retain it *ad infinitum*, and thus to decide the war. It can be approved only, if he was resolved to take the offensive as soon as the expected reinforcements had arrived.

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I have also touched shortly upon the method of issuing orders obtaining at the Austrian Army Headquarters ; but I wish to add something more. We find instructions filling six closely printed quarto pages, and all are of about that length, even when, owing to changes, as many as three or four were issued on the same day. Who, I ask you, will read all this matter, and where are the clerks to be got from for writing, copying and collating them ? How much time must elapse before these orders were read and understood, and then transmitted and executed ? In war it is of the utmost importance to be as sparing of words in instructions and orders, as of human lives in battle, or of detaching troops. For the longer the orders the more difficult they are to understand. In looking over those under discussion we find that their length was due mainly to two reasons. First, to their dealing with the arrangements for many days in advance and for so many different cases ; secondly, because a mass of minor details were gone into which were partly matters of ordinary routine and partly the concern of the different corps and divisions. But such encroachment upon the sphere of subordinate commanders has much graver consequences than those due to their length. It destroys in the first place all initiative in the subordinate commanders. If the army headquarters staff accustoms the army to having every little detail regulated from above, then anything not specially ordered will certainly be neglected and good opportunities allowed to slip by. If Gyulai did not prohibit the storming of the bridge at Valenza on that evening when the corps reported it practicable, it was only due to lack of initiative,

fostered by the prevailing system of orders, that the bridge was not taken by surprise.

How different was the practice of the German army in 1870. Sometimes when Manteuffel gave orders for the attack on a town or position, a report would arrive from Goeben that he had taken the town, carried the position, etc. Non-interference with the sphere of action of subordinates and calling them to account for sins of omission where opportunities might have been improved by spontaneous action, creates the spirit of the initiative. Interference by superiors with details really pertaining to subordinates, paralyses it.

Details as to the disposing of small bodies of troops, such as we frequently find in the long-winded orders in question, orders for brigades, half-brigades, even single battalions and squadrons, have the further disadvantage that these details must again be repeated next day, because subordinate commanders cannot, for instance, dispose of a battalion already disposed of from headquarters. The details increase in number and the orders become more lengthy. The poet says: "Unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles." When the practice of disposing of brigades, instead of entire army corps only, has once gained ground in the command of an army, corps will be dismembered before you know where you are, and the troops mixed up. And then we see almost invariably loose and temporary, instead of permanently organized commands. At Montebello 5 brigades belonging to four different corps were placed under Stadion's orders. Zobel had to attack at Palestro with his own and some other division. Clam at Magenta commanded troops from various corps.

You will probably agree with me that this could only lead to bad results, and render regular supply of food and material doubtful. We are already agreed in this point, that troops fight better when forming part of their own

proper organization than when forming part of a temporary command.

The orders and dispositions of the German army in the war of 1870 show an exemplary, laconic brevity. But in all of them a certain scheme is adhered to.

1st. Information about the enemy.

2nd. What we want to do.

3rd. Orders for the 1st corps.

4th. Orders for the 2nd corps.

5th. Orders, etc.

The orders were simultaneously dictated to as many officers as there were corps in the army, usually to the staff officers detailed by each corps to obtain them, and every corps thus knew the orders for every other one as well as the plans of the Commander-in-Chief.

The details, such as covering flanks, keeping up communication, outposts, reconnaissance as far to the front as possible, etc., were then arranged by corps commanders without orders from higher authority; they were also expected to take advantage of any opportunity for independent action, so long as it was in accord with the general plan.

This did not preclude, when the Commander-in-Chief had reason to lay special stress upon some particular point, some corps receiving a special task, for instance, to push its outposts forward to a certain point, to specially reconnoitre this or that point, to specially cover either flank, to occupy a certain town with a specified number of troops. But when the usual brief army order did not cover the special situation of some body of troops, a corps for instance, special information or instructions would be sent to it, or else a staff officer familiar with the general plan of the Commander-in-Chief, as I have mentioned to you before.

Now you will perhaps say that strategy is not a science, not even an art, but only a trade if it can be practised according to a certain scheme. For all I care, you may

call it anything you like. The great poet also calls it a trade. "The trade of war" is an expression for all kinds of warlike action. Call it a mechanical art, if that suits you, but a very difficult one. For its calculations are made with the most uncertain elements.

Lastly, I will answer your two questions as to what I think that Gyulai should have ordered on the night from the 31st May to the 1st June, and what he should have ordered on the 3rd June for the following day.

Ad. 1. Let us suppose that Gyulai became aware on the night before the 1st June that the whole main body of the enemy was concentrated in the space between Novara, Vercelli and Palestro. From this he might infer that the enemy would advance upon the troops which had attacked him the day before at Palestro, or undertake a flank march upon San Martino and Milan. The former supposition was the more probable, since a flank march between a hostile army not yet defeated, and the Alps, was so risky for the allies, that one should think they would try first to defeat the enemy and march to Milan afterwards.

To halt the two and a half army corps in front of Palestro on 1st June and wait the enemy's attack, was therefore correct. But the counter-orders and consequent exhaustion of the troops should have been avoided, and Reischach's division brought up, as it might safely have entrusted the duty of observation to a squadron. No less sound was the movement of the 3rd Corps northward against Novara, when in the course of the day no attack was made by the enemy, and the probability of an advance on San Martino by the enemy became greater.

But the 5th and 8th Corps should also have been brought up to Gambolo and Mortara in support of the three army corps in the first line, as early as possible on the same day, and the cavalry pushed ahead to collect accurate information of the enemy. The 9th Corps and Urban should have been ordered by telegraph to march to Magenta with all available forces and report to Clam,

who, aided by these troops, should have taken the offensive from San Martino unless himself attacked. The duty of guarding the Po might have been delegated by the three corps to a minimum of troops, chiefly cavalry.

If the enemy did not attack on the 2nd June, but continued his march on San Martino, he could be attacked in flank from Mortara, by five army corps, and brought into the same position in which the Sardinian army were defeated in 1849. The whole foreign military world expected this from Gyulai. It was, however, necessary that this flank attack should be definitely decided upon for the 2nd June unless the enemy attacked on the 1st. Otherwise it would have been one of those half measures, which are a mistake, to halt on the former date.

Ad. 2. As soon as the retreat over the Ticino on the 3rd June had begun, nothing remained but to continue it on the 4th, and unite the whole army at Magenta. But this required that the other corps (5th and 8th) should be put in motion early on the morning of June 4th, to secure their co-operation at this point, which was seen to be the decisive one. Urban and the 9th Corps should have been ordered to march in this direction as early as the afternoon of the 3rd and 4th respectively, so that they might be available at any rate on the 5th June, should the battle be renewed on the second day.

The result of the battle at Magenta proves that if the forces available had only been utilized, a victory was still possible in spite of the previous blunders.

It is easy to criticize after the event. But we cannot help saying once more that these operations show it is impossible to be too strong for the decisive battle.



## THIRTEENTH LETTER.

THE OPERATIONS OF THE ALLIES UP TO THE 4TH JUNE,  
1859.

TO-DAY I am going to discuss this campaign from the other, the Franco-Sardinian, side.

I can make it somewhat shorter, for much that might be mentioned I have already discussed, and you might again charge me with useless and tireless repetition, were I to go over the same ground again in detail. For instance, the want of harmony between the policy and strategy of Napoleon, who threw down the gauntlet to the Austrian Empire on 1st January, 1859, though he was not prepared to give battle before the middle of May.

We will not, therefore, further consider this very essential element, but accept it as a *fait accompli*. In that case we cannot but acknowledge that the strategy of the French Emperor up to the middle of May was perfectly rational.

Roughly speaking he had five army corps and the Guards available for the war in Italy. These figures we will also accept as correct. Whether they are open to criticism, would be difficult to decide now. The data furnished by our available sources of information give no grounds to do so.

Let us therefore accept them as the basis from which to start, and let us accept the fact that he allowed himself to be surprised by Austria beginning the war. After that he avoided hostilities as long as possible,

until he had so completed the strategical deployment as to be strong enough to undertake a successful offensive. The strategical deployment was his first aim. Later events furnish no ground for supposing that his plan of operations contemplated anything beyond it. Least of all it is to be supposed that he contemplated from the beginning the march along the southern foot of the Alps to turn the enemy's right. If that had been his plan from the beginning, he would not have first concentrated his troops opposite the enemy's left.

He could have no other object than to bring assistance to his ally as quickly as possible. To do this with the greatest possible number of troops, he had to march towards the Sardinian army by all the roads at his disposition.

Only two were, however, available, that over Mont Cenis across the Alps, and that by sea to Genoa and thence across the Apennines. To complete the strategical deployment it would then become necessary to unite the columns, approaching by different roads, before taking further action.

You will not deny the activity of the commander of the French army, but must acknowledge that from the moment of the delivery of the Austrian ultimatum at Turin, the work of carrying out the strategical deployment was pushed with all energy.

As early as 25th April, 17 military trains left for the south of France in one day (p. 168 Austrian Official Account). Considering that in 1870, when the efficiency of railway transport had materially increased, we were unable to despatch more than 18 trains per day, the above certainly represents the maximum that could be done in 1859.

The point of concentration of the Sardinian army was naturally the aim of the strategical deployment of the French army. This point of concentration of the Sardinian army had been very properly chosen because

the selection was based upon the existing means of defence.

The proximity of the fortress of Alessandria, however deficient it may have been, promised at any rate some gain of time against an attack of the enemy from the east, to the south of the Po. Again the water-line of the Po could not but delay an enemy advancing from the Lomellina, from the north. And should this enemy advance against Turin, his flank and rear would be threatened by the army in position at San Salvatore.

But to get to the point of concentration selected had this disadvantage, it necessitated a separation, one part of the army marching from Mont Cenis through Susa, the other from Genoa through Serravalle.

The first aim of the French Commander, therefore, was to reinforce the Sardinian army as quickly as possible and to delay the decisive action until a sufficient number of troops should have completed the strategical deployment to take the offensive. Up to that moment it was in the interest of the French Commander to maintain a rigid defensive and to avoid every decisive action.

We see that this was carried out with commendable consistency.

The Austrian Official Account expresses the surmise that months before the war broke out, the French Government sent guns and ammunition to Sardinia under the name of merchandise in order to diminish the amount to be transported at the outbreak of the war. I cannot believe this, if for no other reason than that it is known that the artillery received the new (rifled) guns, for the first time when embarking at Marseilles and Toulon.

Furthermore, according to the field states, some of the regulation number of batteries were still absent on the day of the battle of Magenta.

If guns and ammunition were actually shipped to Piedmont as merchandise, they were needed to complete

the equipment of the Sardinian army, and may for this purpose have been manufactured in France.

The Austrian Official Account also mentions several times that French accounts keep secret the whereabouts of the IV. Corps from May 2nd to the 7th, and thinks it possible that it may have arrived at Turin before the III. Corps, the head of which reached Susa and Alessandria on the 2nd, and which had required several days to defile over the Mont Cenis. This seems to imply a charge against the French Government of violating the frontier before the declaration of war. I do not believe that, in view of the now unavoidable war, Napoleon's conscience would have declined the responsibility of crossing the frontier without a declaration of war. Napoleon I. said of one of his acts: "*J'avoue que c'était un crime, mais ce n'était pas une faute*" (Memoirs of Madame de Rémusat).

It is certain, however, that the army corps, crossing the Mont Cenis, reached the vicinity of San Salvatore and Alessandria in advance of those disembarked at Genoa. For on May 10th both corps (III. and IV.), which had crossed the Mont Cenis, were already at Alessandria and its vicinity, while the I. and II. Corps were massed on the line Novi-Cassano only between the 7th and 14th May, without advancing beyond it towards Alessandria, i.e. at the northern mouth of the Apennine pass, in which the Guards were still extending as far back as Genoa, while the V. was only just beginning its disembarkation. Hence it would seem that the commander of the French army had made a miscalculation as to the rapidity of the transport by sea. At any rate, the masses would have been assembled in the vicinity of San Salvatore and Alessandria at an earlier date, if three corps had been sent over the Mont Cenis and two through Genoa. Perhaps the passage of the Mont Cenis was believed to be more difficult and to consume more time than really was the case. Still stronger obstacles on the part of the elements

—for instance, snow storms—had perhaps been anticipated.

A greater carrying capacity of the railroad Genoa-Alessandria may also have been counted upon than was proved afterward to exist. For, judging from the slow advance of the I., II., and Guard Corps from Genoa to Alessandria, these parts of the army might just as well have crossed the Apennines on foot. Accurate information as to the arrangements for transport by land and sea are lacking, and a definite opinion cannot therefore be given.

At any rate, the approach by both routes was carried out with as much energy as caution. For the troops were not thrown into the strategical deployment by driblets, as they arrived, but assembled by corps at the mouth of the mountain defiles, and then brought up united.

Thus the I. and II. Corps formed a living bridge-head on the line Novi-Cassano, north of Serravalle, from the 7th to the 14th May, while the Guards were coming through the defiles of the mountains, and if the IV. Corps actually passed the Mont Cenis in advance of the III. Corps, and assembled in position at Turin to cover the transport of the latter by rail, afterwards marching to its place in line on foot, then the same precaution was observed by this part of the army.

As to the use of the V. Corps, a violation of the principle that for the decisive battle one should be as strong as possible, might be alleged because only one of its divisions (Autemarre's), after alarming the enemy at Bobbio, and making him uneasy for that section of country, was directed to the place assigned to the corps in the strategical deployment, the remainder (one division of infantry and one brigade of cavalry) being sent to Tuscany to form a nucleus for the troops being raised there.

It might be argued that it would have been better to bring up the whole of the V. Corps for the decisive battle.

But the transport of this corps was effected later than the others, owing, it would seem, to the lack of vessels. For Autemarre's division did not begin to disembark at Genoa until the 10th May, and then it had to be considered whether the enemy would not have been reinforced by a larger force than that in question, if the whole corps were waited for.

After this general consideration of the measures adopted for effecting the strategical deployment, we can recapitulate its execution by a short sketch of the positions of the army on certain days. You will notice that the commander of the French army insisted on keeping intact the corps organization, an exception being made in the case of the V. Corps only. Contemporaries seem to think that the Emperor had personal reasons for keeping the commanding general of this corps somewhat in the background.<sup>1</sup>

Being thus able to direct the movements of the army with greater ease, the Allies had a considerable advantage over the Austrian army owing to the practice which prevailed in it of breaking up the corps organization for every battle, as we have already seen.

On the 2nd May the five Piedmontese divisions stood in the vicinity of San Salvatore. One division of the III. French corps was at Alessandria, one brigade at Susa, the rest of the corps and the whole of the IV. Corps were approaching from the Mont Cenis pass. The head of the I. Corps was at Serravalle, the II. and the Guard Corps in the Apennines on the march from Genoa.

On the 4th May the III. Corps was partly at Alessandria, the IV. on the road between Susa and Turin. Of the corps approaching from Genoa the I. Corps alone had passed the defile of Serravalle and formed on the line Gavi-Novì-Tortona; the II. Corps and the Guards were still in the defiles of the mountains, reaching back as far as Genoa.

The news that the Austrian 8th Corps had crossed the Po

<sup>1</sup> The commander of this corps was Prince Napoleon.—ED.

caused the Allies great uneasiness lest the whole Austrian force should interpose between the separated parts of their army and defeat them in detail as they emerged from the defiles. The commanding general of the I. Corps had the position fortified and made preparations for an energetic defence, in order to keep the mouths of the defiles of the Apennines open. On the 5th May a reconnaissance made by an Austrian brigade caused a panic among the inhabitants of Tortona, who fled from the town to the French position. We may judge from this as to the probable success of an attack upon San Salvatore by the Austrians on the 2nd May.

The supreme commander of the Allies, if anyone were in this position at this date, must have felt much relieved upon hearing that the Austrians had begun to recross the river on the 6th May.<sup>1</sup>

On the 7th and 8th May, the I. and II. Corps stood side by side at the northern foot of the Apennines, the I. at Cassano, Serravalle, and the vicinity; on its left the II. Corps near Gavi; in rear the Guards from Buzalla to Genoa. You see, they did not mean to let the corps advance singly and be beaten in detail. The III. and IV. Corps were in position at and near Alessandria with the exception of one brigade left at Susa, and the Piedmontese divisions still remained near the position of San Salvatore from Alessandria to Casale. Garibaldi was at the latter place.

The advance of the Austrian army beyond the Sesia on the 8th May again caused the Allies great uneasiness, as shown in the work "*Campagne de l'Empereur.*" There was the fear lest the Austrian troops might push rapidly on Turin, for there were but few troops in the vicinity available for the defence of the capital. A reconnaissance against the bridge-head of Casale also caused great disquietude, although the Austrian troops

<sup>1</sup> The supreme command over all the troops had been reserved for the Emperor Napoleon, who, however, had not as yet arrived.

employed were but few in number. The work adds: "But it was learned with surprise on May 9th, that the Austrian commander was retiring through Vercelli."

(I cannot omit repeating that activity in war always makes some impression upon the enemy, while inactivity encourages him.)

From the 7th to the 14th May the I. and II. Corps made movements of concentration only on the line Novi-Cassano; the Guards stood behind them.

The other wing of the Allies, i.e. the five Piedmontese divisions and the III. and IV. French Corps, stood but 9½ miles farther north between Alessandria and Casale. The cause of this inactivity during a whole week may have been that the preparations in rear of the army for its subsistence and supply of material were not so far completed that operations could be begun with any prospect of success. Only a few Piedmontese troops and Garibaldi advanced northward from Casale and established themselves opposite Vercelli.

The first troops of the V. Corps began to disembark at Genoa. Marshal Baraguay d'Hilliers, commanding the right wing of the Allies, became alarmed for his right flank owing to the reconnaissance against Bobbio (undertaken by the Austrians purely for their own security), and sent the first of these troops to that place as soon as disembarked. This movement, as we know, in turn alarmed Gyulai for his left flank. (General D. was right in saying that both sides were all the time afraid of one another.)

The Emperor Napoleon landed at Genoa on the 12th May, and on assuming command of the allied armies issued the customary proclamation.

On the 15th May the I. Corps remained in its position; the II. Corps advanced slightly in a northern direction approaching the line Alessandria-Tortona. The Guards advanced to the line Cassano-Spinola. The head of the leading brigade of the V. Corps approaching Bobbio,



reached Ottone. The III. Corps took position along the Po from Pomaro to Valenza, while behind it to the south was the IV. Corps.

Two divisions of the Piedmontese army and Garibaldi's troops stood opposite Vercelli in the vicinity of San Germano, the remaining three were distributed from Alessandria to Casale.

The Piedmontese cavalry was distributed among the army, part of it being attached to the French army, as the cavalry of the latter was only brought over after the other troops.

On the 15th May, the Emperor inspected the position of the army, which had a front of about 43 miles. He criticized the dispersion as creating a dangerous situation, and observed that for the defence of a river-line a central position was better from which to throw superior masses upon the enemy while in the act of crossing.

The enemy had been standing on the opposite side of the river since the 11th May, ready to defend it, and, as we know, was just expecting on the 15th a general attack from the Allies. (Austrian Official Account, p. 247, etc.)

It is a question which of the two belligerents had the best reason on the 15th May for remaining on the defensive and delaying a decision. Gyulai expected on this day the arrival of the 9th Corps, and that of the 1st Corps by the end of May. Napoleon had nothing to wait for except Autemarre's division of the V. Corps. If both sides had had correct information of the enemy's position (Napoleon had better information than Gyulai), Gyulai would have known that from the 11th May the opportunity was gone for interposing between the two wings of the enemy and beating them in detail. It was in his interest now to put off the decision. It was Napoleon's, on the contrary, to seek it as soon as possible because his superiority in numbers was decreasing daily. Strategical considerations, therefore, enjoined it on him. We shall see later on that

he subordinated his strategy to general political considerations.

The fact that both sides made careful preparations for defending the river appears almost comical.

The arrangements now made by the Emperor to avoid mixing up the French and Piedmontese troops were certainly judicious.

By the 17th May the Piedmontese forces were moved to and concentrated around Casale (the two divisions previously pushed forward against Vercelli being withdrawn), while the French were posted from Valenza to Voghera.

For this purpose the IV. Corps relieved the III. in the position of San Salvatore, pushing its advanced troops to the Po and connecting with the Piedmontese at Casale. On the other bank of the Tanaro and connecting with the IV. Corps, the II. Corps was posted at Sale, on its right the I. Corps at Ponte Curone, one division reaching as far as Voghera. The III. Corps was posted in rear at Tortona, the Guards at Alessandria as reserves for the right and left wings of the army. The leading regiment of the V. Corps stood at Bobbio, two more at Genoa. The remainder of the corps had not yet landed.

Thus the army occupied a front of 38 miles facing the Po; on the 17th May the strategical deployment, as contemplated by the Emperor, may be considered as completed, and, from a strategical point of view, the beginning of the operations was now to be expected.

The movements of troops to the right (east) in taking up their defensive position made Gyulai uneasy lest the Allies contemplated an advance in force in the direction of Piacenza. To ascertain this he ordered the reconnaissance towards Montebello.

In the meantime Garibaldi was directed on the 18th May to march round the right wing of the Austrian army in the north, and to raise an insurrection in the Alps and

in Lombardy. He moved forward through Biella and Gattinara. He was followed until the 20th May by three Piedmontese divisions, one of which occupied on this day Vercelli evacuated by the Austrians, while two took post between Vercelli and Casale, the other two remaining at Casale and on the Po (Frassinetto).

The French army remained in its positions until roused by the expedition of the enemy against Montebello on the 20th May, by which time nine battalions of Autemarre's division of the V. Corps had joined the army.

When the Austrians appeared before Montebello on this date, Foret's division came up from Voghera followed by Bazaine's division in support, and, according to one French source, Ladmiraault's division also.

During the engagement the Emperor was at Vercelli reconnoitring, an important fact as indicating his plan.

On the 21st May he ordered the whole I. Corps to Voghera into position facing east, the II. Corps on its left to Cornale, Casei and the neighbourhood, the III. Corps to the rear to Ponte Curone. Autemarre's division of the 5th Corps reached Bobbio. The 4th Corps and the guards remained in their positions at San Salvatore and Alessandria.

Thus the first-named corps occupied a defensive position against an expected renewal of the attack on the part of the Austrians from the east.

The Piedmontese divisions made demonstrations along the Sesia.

Garibaldi reached the Ticino at Casteletto south of Sesto Calende.

On the 22nd May, when the Austrians failed to make their appearance, the three army corps of the right wing made a slight advance in an easterly direction. The head of the I. Corps reached Casteggio, the II. followed to Voghera and was relieved in its former position by the III. Corps.

On the 23rd May the three corps just named advanced eastward, i.e. they closed up.

The head of the Ist Corps, it seems, did not move, for it is stated that it was between Casteggio and Montebello. The rear of the II. and the head of the III. Corps were at Voghera. The centre (Guards and IV. Corps) moved slightly eastward. The Piedmontese divisions remained along the Sesia from Casale to Vercelli. Garibaldi reached Varese, inflaming the inhabitants of the northern parts of Lombardy (on the following day he received from Cavour the telegram, "*Insurrezione generale e immediata*").

On the 24th, 25th, and 26th May no movement was made by the army of the Allies. On the 26th Garibaldi successfully repulsed a not very serious attack made by Urban from Como with one brigade. On the same day Prince Napoleon began to disembark the remainder of the V. Corps at Leghorn.

On the 26th May the Emperor reconnoitred Vercelli for the second time, and subsequently the entire forces of the Allies were put in motion toward that point on the 27th May.

Thus in the seven days from 20th to 26th May the three army corps of the right wing made a very slight movement toward the east. For the head of the leading Corps, the I., did not advance more than  $9\frac{1}{2}$  miles, from Voghera to Casteggio.

The French Official Account characterizes this movement as a demonstration, by means of which the Emperor, feeling that Gyulai was uneasy for his left wing, intended to confirm the latter in his error. But as a practical fact he put more than one half of his army in motion towards the point in question, and thus made more than a mere demonstration.

Considering that the Emperor reconnoitred at Vercelli as early as 20th May, and moved the Piedmontese troops in this direction, you will probably agree with me that his first intention was to use all the points of passage of the

upper Sesia on the 21st May for an offensive with all his forces, and that he only abandoned this plan temporarily for fear that the engagement at Montebello might be followed up by Gyulai taking the offensive south of the Po with all his forces. He therefore put the three corps there into a defensive position, and when no enemy appeared, pushed their heads slowly forward  $9\frac{1}{2}$  miles to reconnoitre.

It would almost seem as though the French account wished to hide the fact that the Emperor allowed himself to be deceived by the engagement at Montebello, insignificant in itself, and thus lost seven days for his operations. During these seven days he might easily have lost the passages of the Sesia at Vercelli and Garibaldi might have been destroyed.

I have remarked on a former occasion that the result of the engagement at Montebello furnishes another proof that every assumption of the initiative is of value. These seven days also give us another example of two opponents each afraid of the other.

On the 27th May the army was put in motion toward Vercelli.

On the 30th May the IV. Corps having passed the Sesia stood at Borgo Vercelli with its outposts toward Novara at Orfengo, the III. Corps arrived at Prarolo opposite Palestro, the Guards at Trino, the II. Corps at Casale, the I. Corps at Valenza, Autemarre's division remained at Tortona. Thus the troops had been moved 43 miles to their left in these four days. Considering that probably many circuitous routes were taken, in order to use several roads simultaneously (as, for instance, by the Guards who reached Trino by way of Pontestura), and seeing how difficult and necessarily slow such lateral movements are in which one corps always follows in rear of the other while the enemy must be continually watched, I must acknowledge that this flank movement was carried out with determination and without hesitation. That it

also remained unknown to the enemy, we already know.

Details of these movements and how many parallel roads were available, are lacking. The railroads, even the one running through Turin, seem to have been utilized, for the reports of the Austrian spies repeatedly mention the movement of troops by train from Turin.

It is well known that the shorter the distance to be passed over, the less is the strategical value of railroads, while troops moving by them are always under this disadvantage, that they are not at once ready for battle as is the case when marching. But they are always of great assistance for distances exceeding one day's march, especially when they help to avoid the crowding of large masses on one road.

We have already commented upon the difficulty of moving more than three corps on the same road one behind the other. The question here was to move 5 divisions and  $5\frac{1}{2}$  army corps which stood beside one another, to the left, i.e. one in rear of the other.

The existence of a railroad and the use of parallel roads to the Po, at Casale and Pontestura, and from there to Vercelli, as stated in the French Official Account, no doubt facilitated the execution of the movement. Still, the arrangements for the same must have been well considered, the work of the staff must have been very judiciously performed, to bring the corps, as was the case, in good order and complete to their destination at the proper time, i.e. the machinery of strategical execution must have worked smoothly. I regret not to have at my disposal the special arrangements for the execution of the marches, and the detailed orders, to glean from them hints useful in practice.

In comparison with the movements ordered by the Austrian commander in this campaign, one is agreeably struck by the fact, as already stated, that the organic composition of the corps was not disturbed.

The main principle in strategy, of simultaneously employing the greatest strength possible for the decisive battle, was also adhered to. All the forces that had been in the defensive position south of the Po were sent to the upper Sesia excepting nine battalions of Autemarre's division (three were placed under to the King of Sardinia), and the fifth Piedmontese division posted along the Po from Alessandria to Casale. These 19 battalions (with some cavalry) posted opposite Gyulai's main body, were deemed sufficient to mask the movement. And the majority of these when the last regiment of Autemarre's division arrived at Tortona from Genoa was afterward withdrawn to Vercelli to hold the passages of the Sesia there. Thus 19 battalions were sufficient to cover flank and rear. Compare with this the masses of troops which Gyulai used for the same purpose.

After building bridges at Vercelli for the purpose of simultaneously crossing large bodies over the Sesia, four Piedmontese divisions and the French III. Corps crossed the river there on the 30th May, and easily pushing back the weak Austrian outposts, took up a position 5 miles forward from Vercelli on an arc from Palestro to Confienza, Casalino, and Orfengo. They entrenched themselves and thus formed a living bridge-head for the rest of the army which was to follow the next day.

During the same night Prarolo was connected with Palestro by three bridges, and when the Austrians attacked on the 31st May, they met not only the troops already on the east bank, themselves superior in number to themselves, but were also assailed by the French III. Corps hurrying up from Prarolo by these new bridges.

While thus on the 31st May the combined corps of Zobel strove in vain against superior numbers, the French II. Corps was brought up from Casale and through Vercelli to Borgo-Vercelli by a march of 19 miles; the Guards, in reserve, occupied Vercelli; the I. Corps leaving one regiment at Valenza, which made successful

demonstrations, marched to Casale by three parallel roads. The IV. Corps, the head of which was already at Orfengo, moved through Camariano on Novara, and made the enemy uneasy for his right flank.

On the evening of the 31st May, therefore, the troops stood as follows:—

The IV. Corps on the left flank close to Novara (Camariano); to its right four Piedmontese divisions from Casalino to Palestro; on the right flank at the last-named place the III. Corps and the three battalions of the V. Corps above mentioned. The II. Corps and the Guards at Vercelli and Borgo-Vercelli formed the reserves for the left wing. The reserve for the right wing at Casale was the I. Corps, which after the construction of the three bridges at Prarolo was now able to reach Palestro by a march of about 14 miles. The 5th Piedmontese Division held the line from Casale to Alessandria, and Autemarre's Division was at the last-named place and Tortona.

Five French corps and four Piedmontese divisions were thus united on the evening of the 31st May, on a front of less than  $9\frac{1}{2}$  miles and with a depth of 14 miles at the most, less than  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the opponent just defeated and separated from him by no obstacle worth mentioning.

Just imagine the First Napoleon at the head of such an army. Does it not remind you of his concentrated position behind the heights of Pratzen on the morning of the battle of Austerlitz, whence, launching forth, he broke the centre of the Allies?

Such an attack was not made on June 1.

We know already that on the 31st May Garibaldi made an unsuccessful attempt to surprise the enemy at Laveno, and drew upon himself a considerable part of the enemy's forces.

On the 1st June Napoleon caused the left wing of his army to make a slight movement in an easterly direction. The IV. Corps easily took Novara at daybreak, and pushed Mengin's small forces back to San Martino. One division



followed a short distance in this direction, the remainder of the IV. Corps took up a defensive position south of Novara, facing toward Mortara. Behind it, south of Novara, stood the II. Corps in reserve. The Guards were brought up to Novara. The I. Corps with one brigade of the 5th Piedmontese Division followed from Casale to Vercelli and Borgo-Vercelli. The four divisions of the Piedmontese army and the III. French Corps remained in front of the enemy. Robbio, having been reported by the inhabitants as evacuated by the enemy, was taken possession of.

On the 2nd June the movement against Magenta and Milan was begun from Novara by a forward movement of Espinasse's division of the II. Corps, on San Martino, and Camou's division of the Guards on Turbigo. The latter division meeting patrols only of the enemy, drove them away, threw a bridge over the Ticino, and established itself at Turbigo. The former division reached Trecate and observed the bridge-head of San Martino. The I. Corps reached Lumellogno on the Agogna (between Novara and Camariano). The rest of the army remained in its position, Autemarre's division sending three battalions to Vercelli.

The French III. Corps and the Piedmontese army were ordered to move on the next day to Novara. To cover the flank march of the whole army the IV. Corps remained in position south of Novara, facing toward Mortara.

We know that on this day the Austrian 3rd Corps also remained in position north of Mortara, facing toward Novara, to cover the flank march of its army.

Thus these two corps faced each other all day, each waiting for the enemy's attack, each glad not to see anything of him, and without coming in touch with one another. That there is something comical in this situation, you cannot deny.

On the 3rd June the IV. Corps was ordered to obtain information about the enemy. Two divisions (de Faily's

and de Luzy's) moved southward, found the enemy's position empty, and thus discovered the enemy's concentration on the Ticino. But the Emperor was still ignorant as to the bank of the river on which the Austrians would concentrate. In order, therefore, to meet an attack from the south, he left the I. and IV. Corps in position before Novara, brought up the III. Corps from Palestro to the same place, ordered the II. Corps to follow to Turbigo, while the other division of the Guards (Mellinet's) was pushed forward against San Martino. How careful Napoleon was not to break up the corps organization, you may judge from the fact that he ordered Espinasse's division to be relieved by that of Mellinet and join its corps at Turbigo. The four Piedmontese divisions also were brought up from their position on the line Palestro-Casalino, to and through Novara, two being posted with the I. Corps south of Novara in the vicinity of Lomello, two being pushed forward toward Turbigo as far as Galliate.

On the evening of the 3rd June the army stood as follows:—

The II. Corps and Camou's Division of the Guards at Turbigo astride the river; at Galliate, 9½ miles from there, were two Piedmontese divisions.

Mellinet's division of the Guards at Trecate in front of San Martino.

The I., III., and IV. Corps and two Piedmontese divisions in the position of Novara.

Of Autemarre's division of the V. Corps two regiments (6 battalions) were now used to guard Vercelli, and three regiments (9 battalions) remained at Tortona and Alessandria. The 5th Piedmontese Division remained distributed along the Po and Sesia.

Thus the II. Corps (2 divisions), 1 division of the Guards, and 2 Piedmontese divisions, altogether 5 divisions, stood ready to cross at Turbigo.

In the vicinity of the passage over the river at San Martino there was only the other division of the Guards.

But the rest of the army (II divisions of infantry) was only about 7 miles off, and, if the passage at San Martino proved practicable, could in a short time be directed on Magenta by way of San Martino.

The Emperor's plans for the 4th June, as set forth in the official publication called "*Campagne de L'Empereur*," are wholly unintelligible to me. According to this work he intended to take up a position on the 4th June facing south, the left wing (II. Corps) at Magenta, the centre (III. and IV. Corps) at San Martino and Trecate, the right wing (I. Corps) to the south of Novara. The Piedmontese in reserve at Galliate. Such a position, without obstacles in front or protection for the flanks, astride a stream which formed an impassable obstacle devoid of bridges, was no position at all.

Since the Emperor, Napoleon III., had a good deal of sound judgment, I believe that Fruston states the Emperor's plans more correctly.

According to him, the Emperor meant to advance on Milan and to make demonstrations from San Martino against Magenta only until the movement from Turbigo against the enemy's flank should allow the army to defile over the Naviglio Grande. As long as there was a possibility of an attack by the enemy against Novara from the south, he intended to leave the troops there in their position and to bring them up to San Martino and against Magenta only as required and when they could be spared, so as to convert the previous demonstration from San Martino into a serious attack.

This in fact was done, and for this reason Fruston's statement of the Emperor's plans sounds like a description which, written up afterward, shows indications of having been influenced by the facts. But it agrees well with the situation and with the previous line of action, it is so plain, natural, and rational, that I cannot help accepting it.

It was therefore Napoleon's general intention to reach Milan, which is evident from his march from Vercelli to

Novara. The possibility of an attack from Mortara or Vigevano while still on the right (west) bank of the Ticino, prevented him from carrying out his intention at once with all his forces.

So far as the original plans of a monarch are concerned we must, it is true, rather guess at them, while we may ascertain those of the commander of an army from the reports he has to make to the former. This is an element which gives to a monarch commanding his own army a strategical advantage over a general who is dependent upon his Government. The former, if he has not previously expressed his intentions, can more easily deviate from them afterward without having to disavow them, while the latter is more closely bound to the plans once explained, and must always explain his reasons beforehand.<sup>1</sup>

At 10 o'clock on the morning of the 4th June Mellinet's Division of the Guards began to defile over the bridge at San Martino; a slight engagement followed at the passage over the Naviglio; then the engagement at the first point ceased until after 12 o'clock, because the Emperor wanted to await the effect of the troops coming from Turbigo upon the enemy's flank, before taking the bull by the horns. When the action at Buffalora was heard, Mellinet's division began the attack in earnest.

MacMahon had started from Turbigo, but gaining a temporary success only with one division at Buffalora, he had to wait for the arrival of the other divisions.

In the meantime Mellinet's Division took the passage over the Naviglio Grande by assault, but was driven back by the reinforcements brought up by the enemy and placed in a precarious position (3.30 p.m.). It was extricated by Renaud's Division of the III. Corps. The head of the Austrian 3rd Corps arrived on the flank of these divisions from the south-west of the Naviglio, and again placed the

<sup>1</sup> The work of the Prussian General Staff on the war of 1859 in Italy also mentions these fetters which bound the hands of Master-General-of-Ordnance Count Gyulai.

French corps in imminent danger (4.30 p.m.). Soon, however, the latter were succoured (4.45 p.m.) by Trochu's division (III. Corps) and Vinoy's division (IV. Corps) coming up in support from San Martino.

MacMahon, having by this time brought up his three divisions from Turbigo, deployed them, and, followed by two Piedmontese divisions in second line, began the attack from the north with decisive superiority. The capture of Magenta about dusk put an end to the battle.

During the ensuing night the troops stood as follows :—

Two divisions of the III. Corps at Ponte Vecchio on the Naviglio; the third division arrived during the night from San Martino.

The two divisions of the Guard north of Magenta and at Buffalora.

One division of the IV. Corps was with the III. Corps, the other 2 divisions at Trecate west of the Ticino.

The II. Corps at Magenta.

The I. Corps at Olengo west of the Ticino.

Two of the Piedmontese divisions passed the night at and north of Magenta, the other two were at Turbigo on both banks of the Ticino.

Of the troops available the following had been engaged :—

Of the Guards 2 divisions.

„ II. Corps 2 „

„ IV. „ 2 „

„ III. „ 1 division.

—

Total 7 divisions.

In addition to which the following took no part in the battle, viz :—

Of the I. Corps 3 divisions.

„ IV. „ 1 division.

„ III. „ 2 divisions.

Piedmontese 4 „

—

Total 10 divisions.

I mention the infantry divisions only, because they alone were capable of decisive action in the battle on account of the rough character of the ground.

It appears from this, that on both sides an equal proportion of troops were engaged on the 4th June, and that an equal proportion would have been available on both sides for renewing the struggle the next day.

The Emperor was so little aware of his victory that he halted his army on the 5th, and even ordered three divisions of Piedmontese infantry and another of cavalry to recross the Ticino and assemble at San Martino, a wholly defensive measure.

The data at my disposal as to the Emperor's strategical arrangements during the battle are incomplete, but may be sufficiently completed by simply inserting the facts.

Two Piedmontese divisions were dispatched from the vicinity of Novaro after McMahon's five divisions, which were engaged in the turning movement by way of Turbigo. Only one of them crossed the Ticino at Turbigo by the evening. This shows how much importance the Emperor attached to this turning movement.

For the attack on the Naviglio from San Martino he employed up to the afternoon only one division of the Guards. At 3.30 p.m. one division, and from 4.45 p.m. another division, of the III. Corps and one of the IV. Corps, took part in the battle.

It is surprising that Mellinet's Division of the Guards, which had crossed the Ticino bridge at 10 a.m., was left to itself for almost six hours, and was reinforced from the III. Corps at so late an hour, although the distance from Novara to the Naviglio was but 9½ miles, and from Trecate (where the left wing of the IV. Corps was) under 5 miles.

This is only to be explained thus, that until noon on June 4, the Emperor regarded an attack by the Austrian army from the south, and on the right (west) bank of the

Ticino as certain, and one for which he must be prepared.

Five years after the war I was talking about it one day to a French officer who had been one of the Emperor's gallopers at the battle of Magenta. I told him that I was unable to understand why Gyulai did not attack from the south on the right bank of the Ticino, as did Radetzky in 1849. The French officer replied that only by considering this could he explain the Emperor's train of thought as to an order, which he had considered as mere obstinacy (*entêtement*). For the former had ordered him to bring up the III. Corps in support of Mellinet's Division. He called the Emperor's attention to the fact that the IV. Corps was nearer and could bring assistance much more quickly. But the Emperor became angry and gave positive orders that the IV. Corps should remain and that the III. should come up, passing in rear of the former.

In the afternoon, when as yet no enemy had been reported in front of the IV. Corps, and the danger at the Naviglio was increasing, it is possible that the Emperor sent orders to the IV. Corps also to come up, and that one of its divisions pushed into the road at the bridge of San Martino ahead of the rear division of the III. Corps.

What this officer said confirmed my surmise that Napoleon, fearing a flank attack by the Austrians from the south, i.e. west of the Ticino, hesitated a long time whether or not to bring more troops across the river at San Martino.

## FOURTEENTH LETTER.

### COMMENTS.

OF the practical lessons in strategy to be drawn from the operations of the Allies, from the beginning of the war up to the battle of Magenta, I have considered in my last letter several relating to the strategical deployment. On this point it only remains to investigate whether it would not have been better for the Allies to have selected a position for this purpose covering Turin, the capital of the country.

The zone for the strategical deployment must, no doubt, be so selected as to cover the base of the army, and the capital of the country which forms an essential part of it, for in it the channels of the administration run together, and private and public resources are united, from which the needs of the army can be supplied. On this account the occupation of the capital by the enemy seriously disturbs the whole government machinery, and impairs the efficiency of the army. Turin, however, was the capital of the base of but a small part of the allied army; the real base of which was formed by the whole of France and Sardinia. The question for the Allies to consider was, therefore, whether it would be the more prejudicial to the success of the campaign if Turin were occupied by the enemy, or if the strategical deployment were interrupted, i.e. the assembling together of the different parts of the army hitherto separated. They had to choose the lesser evil.

The events show that the junction of the French corps marching over the Alps with the Piedmontese troops at



Alessandria took place earlier than of those portions of their army coming by way of Genoa. The latter would have been still longer in reaching Turin, i.e. had the strategical deployment taken place about there, still more time would have been required for it. Strategical considerations, therefore, required the assembly of the armies at Alessandria (San Salvatore). A temporary occupation of the Piedmontese capital by the enemy appeared the lesser, the interruption of the strategical deployment the greater evil. Besides, if the enemy marched to Turin south of the Po and gave them time for collecting sufficient troops between Alessandria and Casale, the Allies might attack him in rear from Casale and reimburse themselves with compound interest for any damage wrought by the temporary occupation of Turin.

The French Official Account informs us that at their headquarters a temporary occupation of Turin by the enemy was anticipated and accepted, the idea had become quite familiar. This stoical adherence to what had once been recognized as strategically correct, deserves our fullest attention. It led to a happy result. It furnishes an additional proof that in war it is important to adhere to what has once been recognized as correct, while too anxious a striving for the best leads to such frequent changes of plan, that the army is marched to and fro, and nothing is accomplished.

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When the strategical deployment was completed according to the Emperor's plan, we noticed the inactivity of the allied army during the two weeks in which it remained entirely on the defensive, although the Austrians might be expected to receive more reinforcements than it.

I hinted in my last letter that from purely strategical considerations the Emperor should have begun offensive operations on the 15th or 17th May, but subordinated

strategy to his politics. I will now therefore throw some light in this direction.

He owed his crown not only to the popularity of his family name in France, but in no small degree also to revolutionary and political agitation. In contrast to his uncle, who had built up his power upon success and glory gained in war, and to the overthrow of revolutionary movements, he still lacked all warlike glory. His army, it is true, had brought the campaign in the Crimea to a successful issue. But his personal glory had not thereby been increased, it rather threatened to wane before that of his generals. He must now needs gain renown as a commander in the field to strengthen his power in France, which was tottering like a ship tossed on that intangible and hard to define element which he called "public opinion." Below its surface the most diverse parties were opposed to one another. The Emperor did not wish to spoil his chance with any of them, but eventually to bring them all into his service one after the other.<sup>1</sup> Orsini's attempt on his life had convinced him that the revolutionary principle to which he owed his rise was now the one most decidedly opposed to him. He thought a reconciliation prudent, and tempted it with the bait of the Italian Propaganda. At the same time he meant to derive strategical advantages from this change in his politics. It was his plan, therefore, to allow the revolutionary agitation in Italy time to attain a certain weight before exposing his well-appointed army to the chances, as yet unknown to him, of the fortune of war. The insurrection all around the Austrian army, and even within country it held, was to draw upon itself, or at any rate detain a considerable part of, the enemy's forces, before he proceeded to the attack, which he intended to make with a superiority of numbers precluding any

<sup>1</sup> A French officer moving in high official circles told me: "Le système de la politique intérieure de l'empereur est un chef-d'œuvre de balance."

possibility of failure. For if on the one side he needed warlike glory to strengthen his power, he could on the other hand not afford to receive a check. He was too well aware of the uncertainty of his power not to fear that the loss of a battle directed by himself might also cost him his crown.

For this reason Garibaldi was first to be sent with his mountaineer riflemen into the northern mountainous parts of Lombardy to raise the standard of insurrection, and it was necessary that the insurrection in Tuscany should first assume definite shape and be given a division of infantry and cavalry under Prince Napoleon, as a nucleus around which the revolutionary forces of the country might crystallize and consolidate. For these reasons revolutionary agitations in Parma and Modena must, in connection with the dangers just mentioned, make the enemy uneasy for his other flank. At the same time a good deal of fuss was made about a descent on the shores of the Adriatic, to form the centre for an insurrection in Trieste and Venetia. I do not know if this expeditionary corps ever existed except on paper. But the Austrian Official Account states that its strength was estimated by the Austrians as that of an entire army corps.

At any rate, these insurrections and demonstrations fettered an incomparably larger force of the Austrians than they cost the allies. For in addition to the 66,845 garrison troops (of which 30,959 were combatants) in the Lombardo-Venetian kingdom enumerated in Appendix 5 of the Official Account, it was deemed necessary on the part of the Austrians to keep back a separate army of two army corps with headquarters at Trieste for the protection of the coast from there to Venetia, and from the mouth of the Po to Borgo Forte. Garibaldi, by his revolutionary agitations, contained for some time Urban's division and all the troops of the 1st Corps which arrived, in the vicinity of Milan and Magenta. For the protection of the

country from Piacenza to the mouth of the Ticino, Gyulai considered the whole 9th Corps and one brigade of the 8th Corps indispensable, even when all regular forces of the enemy had disappeared from this district and he urgently needed his troops at Magenta. Spies informed Gyulai on the 29th May that an attack by 30,000 Tuscans was imminent, and he prepared for an attack by 42,000 French, Tuscans, and other insurgent forces.

Thus the Emperor Napoleon, by his inactivity till the end of May, did not receive larger additions to his strength than the enemy, but the latter was weakened by having his forces contained.

Blume says that after the opening of hostilities, the main object should be the quickest and most complete destruction of the enemy's forces. Napoleon here acted differently and delayed, in order to give the political agitations time to spread. The events show that he was right. But Bronsart says correctly that a number of similar examples is necessary to establish any rule in strategy. The method in question of Napoleon in 1859 should therefore not be accepted as standard simply because it was successful once. It failed him in 1870 when the enemy reckoned only with real forces, which won disposed of the misty phantoms of revolutionary agitations and fantastic demonstrations.

Perhaps you will be surprised by my not touching upon the moral side of such agitations. But so far I have only discussed the strategical part, i.e. the employment of the available forces for gaining a successful issue of the war. The moral part of it belongs to politics. The latter has to consider whether or not to let loose and employ forces which in the end will turn against any and all authority, and whether or not to alienate, by the immorality of the means employed, the sympathies of the better elements which so far, thanks be to God, are in the preponderance in all countries. Let us add that in 1870 Napoleon's politics failed in this direction also.

In my last letter I stated that the Emperor, when he believed the moment for the offensive to have arrived, crossed his army over the Sesia at Vercelli and Palestro, unexpected by the enemy, and united it, with equal rapidity, energy and order, close to the enemy's flank on a front of  $9\frac{1}{2}$  miles with a depth of  $14\frac{1}{2}$  miles. The concentration of more than 150,000 men on such a small space recalls Napoleon's battalion square of 200,000 men in October, 1806.

I also mentioned that it was to be expected that Napoleon would attack the forces opposed to him in front at Robbio on the 1st June, since a simultaneous flank attack by the IV. Corps from Novara would place them in a most critical position. I also stated that nothing of the kind happened. At the risk of being charged by you with repetition, I must again refer to this situation.

The concentration forward of such large bodies of troops always implies considerable exertion on the part of the troops. The regularity of the food supply is always impaired, and the latter becomes more or less deficient. On the morning of the battle of St. Privat I saw a soldier in vain offering to another 10 groschen for a small piece of bread. I could not help him either, for I had nothing myself. And that happened in spite of our almost super-human efforts to keep up the food supply. Such large bodies should therefore be united on such a small space only if it is intended to give battle at once. If battle be not the object of the concentration, then the latter is an error. After the concentration, unless compelled by good reasons, it is an error to delay the decision. If it be not possible to bring this about immediately after concentration, it will always act to the detriment of the army.

In this instance there was no urgent reason why Napoleon should not have sought an immediate decision. The Austrian Official Account states how accurately the French were informed of the positions of their enemy. A French

general expressed his surprise to a captured Austrian officer that the attack on 31st May was undertaken with such small forces, and stated that the French army had accurate information of the strength of the Austrian troops.

Napoleon must therefore have known that on the 1st June he would have before him but 2½ army corps, which for the present could not be supported except by Reischach's division from Candia. Of these one army corps had been defeated the day before. If, therefore, he had attacked at daybreak on the 1st, he might easily have disposed of his immediate opponent in the course of the forenoon. Even had Gyulai given directions in the morning of that day for the 5th and 8th Corps to come up in support from the Po, so as to be available in the afternoon, yet by that time Napoleon might have brought up the Guards from Vercelli and the corps at Casale by way of Prarolo and Palestro, thus preserving his numerical superiority. Under any circumstances it would have been much easier to defeat the enemy on the 1st than on the 4th June, when the defile of San Martino, rendered difficult by the blowing up of the bridge, had to be passed and the passage of the Naviglio had to be forced, rendering necessary the turning movement by way of the defile of Turbigo, a circuitous route which took much time.

Every strategical consideration therefore should have urged the Emperor to attack on the 1st June. Yet he failed to do so, and halted the troops which were in the immediate vicinity of the enemy, only beginning the turning movement which was to bring him to Milan by slightly advancing beyond Novara the corps on the extreme left and by a general movement to the left of the troops in the second line (II. Corps, Guards, and I. Corps) which passed in rear of the troops which were close to the enemy.

What were the reasons which caused the Emperor to desist from an attack on this date?

Once more I can find no other explanation than political considerations.

He may have been disinclined to trust to the chances of a decisive battle because his own position in France was not such as to withstand its loss. He wanted to operate with caution and absolute certainty. Holding Novara, he was nearer to Milan than the Austrian army in its position south of that town in the Lomellina. He was in hopes that the appearance of French troops in Lombardy would inflame the whole country, especially if he should succeed in effecting a junction with Garibaldi. He may have calculated on threatening the enemy's communications by means of this insurrection, rendering his stay in the Lomellina impossible and causing him to retire behind the Mincio. In that way the whole of Lombardy would have fallen into his hands without battle—at least, without a great battle. The enemy, on retiring through a country in open insurrection, would have suffered considerable losses. Opportunities for gaining military glory would not have been wanting, for the French army would only have had to pursue, and all engagements in pursuit eventually end so that they may be proclaimed victories. But the occupation of Lombardy by mere manœuvring without a decisive battle, without great losses of native-born Frenchmen, would have materially increased the lustre of his own strategical abilities. Perhaps he was already thinking of not carrying out verbatim his bombastic words: "Italy free to the Adriatic." If too strong, Italy might one day become hostile to France. Italy, weak and dependent upon him, suited his designs much better. Perhaps if he manœuvred the Austrians out of Lombardy without wounding their feelings by a victory he might make peace and friendship with them on the Mincio. It is possible that all these considerations influenced his decision. Later events justify me in this conjecture.

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He decided upon extending his turning movement round the as yet undefeated enemy. He soon, however, became aware of the well-known principle that he who turns the enemy is himself turned. This principle often arising in tactics, applies in still greater force to strategy. An enemy not yet defeated can only be turned with impunity by a large superiority of numbers and under the condition that those troops only are used in the turning movement which are in excess of the opponent's strength. Observing, however, the indispensable condition of holding the enemy fast by attacking him in front, and preventing him from throwing himself upon the troops engaged in the turning movement. This Napoleon did at Wagram, while Davout was turning the enemy's left wing. Similarly at Magenta, and as the First German Army did on the 14th August, 1870, while the Second Army was securing the passages of the Moselle south of Metz in order to turn the enemy.

Perhaps you will meet my argument with Napoleon's flank movement on the 6th October, 1806, which led to the victories of Jena and Auerstaedt. But this flank movement was not at all intended by him as such. On the contrary, he expected to find the enemy in his front, and hoped to prevent him in time from assembling all his forces there. That it nevertheless led to victory is wholly due to the superiority of his army in numbers and tactics. We have seen how near he came to getting into a dangerous position by this flank movement past the enemy's army.

On the 2nd June the position in which Napoleon had placed himself by this flank movement began to exert its crippling influence. From Novara to Magenta he had not much over 14 miles to march. Why did he not advance from Novara with the three corps he had united there? Because, by such a forward movement, he would have compromised his only line of retreat through Vercelli, as long as the Austrian army could threaten and attack him from the south. He therefore contented himself on the 2nd June with sending one division towards San Martino and



another towards Turbigo on reconnaissance and bringing up in support the I. Corps to the vicinity of Novara (Lumello). The rest of the army remained stationary on this date.

A turning movement, however, which comes to a standstill for a whole day loses the most essential part of its effect, for it gives the enemy the necessary time to withdraw, or he may turn it to the disadvantage of the assailant by a well-timed attack either in front or directed against the turning movement.

The Emperor's situation while carrying out this operation crippled his movements on the 3rd June also. For although he knew that the passage of San Martino could easily be secured and that the one at Turbigo was in his hands, yet he did not dare to withdraw the troops guarding the passage of the Sesia (III. Corps and the Piedmontese), to Novara, or to send additional forces (II. Corps) to Turbigo, until a reconnaissance southward in the direction of Mortara had convinced him that no imminent danger was threatening from that quarter. On the 3rd June therefore nothing could be done beyond sending one corps to Turbigo to join the division of the Guards already there while bringing up the rest of the main body to Novara. Up to this time and until noon on the 4th June the Emperor expected an attack from the south (Vigevano), as I have shown in my last letter, and allowed himself to be prevented by this supposed danger from using all his forces at Magenta even on the last named date.

By arresting the turning movement for two days he lost that element which ensures victory with almost as much certainty as superiority of numbers, viz. surprise. For the enemy learned as early as the evening of the 2nd June that the defile of Turbigo was in the hands of the French, and yet it was not until the morning of the 4th that French troops crossed there in sufficient strength to turn the scale.

We have seen that, to have had the superiority in numbers

in the battle of Magenta, it was only necessary for Gyulai to send orders to the more distant corps on the evening of the 3rd June to advance early the next day, instead of merely telling them to be in readiness to march by noon. Had he with these troops driven back the French divisions which had crossed at San Martino, from the Naviglio to the Ticino, on the 4th June, while warding off MacMahon's troops in order to drive them back through Turbigo the next day, success would have crowned his strategy instead of Napoleon's. Gyulai would stand a great man in the history of the art of war, and would be called the Fabius Cunctator of the 19th century. We will not, however, enter into speculations as to what might have been the strategical and political consequences. They only show that luck plays the most prominent part in the fate of battles, and lead us to believe in that higher wisdom which presides over the issues of battles by which the destinies of nations are decided, as in the war of 1806.

Napoleon III. did well therefore to attack with caution, for he was not in a position to withstand the loss of a battle; nor was he in the position of his uncle which caused him, in the most brilliant period of his military career, 1796 and 1797, to risk everything, because as yet he had nothing to lose and everything to win; the third Napoleon had a crown to lose and nothing much to gain in Italy.

Nor was he in the position in which his uncle was during his later campaigns, accustomed to the decision of battle and convinced by great personal experience that a timely energetic offensive with united forces, a proper use of the moment when the enemy is inferior in numbers, constitutes really the highest degree of caution, and that such an opportunity once lost rarely happens again.

Untimely caution may bring on danger; untimely caution prevented Napoleon III. from improving the opportunity of a brilliant victory on the 1st June; untimely caution caused him to decide upon an enterprise involving

more and greater dangers than the issue of an offensive battle which he might have undertaken on the 1st June with superior numbers. Eventually he won a somewhat doubtful battle at Magenta, for immediately afterward he considered it necessary to make defensive preparations, and only became fully aware of his victory 24 hours later.

True it is, that he wins the victory who makes the fewest mistakes. "C'était à qui faisait le moins de fautes," said the great king in speaking of the battle of Chotusitz.

If Gyulai had used the 5th June to bring up the corps absent on the 4th, and to reorganize behind them the defeated troops of Clam, he would, on the 6th, have stood in a position ensuring respect. In that case the battle of Magenta would have had no further effect beyond pushing back his right wing, instead of becoming a defeat by his retreat.

This is another proof of the assertion which I formerly made, that those troops only are defeated who believe themselves to be defeated. This principle which is only of indirect importance in strategy because it affects the *morale* of troops and thus raises their value, obtains only within certain limits; this limit is reached at the point when a continuation of the struggle would lead to the annihilation of the troops concerned. But this was not the case in this instance.

It would almost seem as though Napoleon had been induced by his success in turning the hostile army in 1859, to make the same movement in 1870 and to turn the enemy's right flank with MacMahon's army from Châlons. We know that in this last operation Napoleon was merely a spectator, and that MacMahon undertook it with reluctance and only upon positive orders from Paris. But the analogy is clear. On both occasions the army moved around the right wing of an army not yet defeated; both marches led close along the frontier, at the foot of the southern slope of a mountain range which troops could

only cross by passes, 1859 the Alps, 1870 the Ardennes.<sup>1</sup> But in 1859 the opponent allowed himself to be imposed upon, made a parallel march to anticipate the enemy, failed to bring up all his forces in time, and was defeated. In 1870 the opponent proved to him that he who turns the enemy is himself turned, attacked him in flank and destroyed him.

<sup>1</sup> It seems somewhat of an exaggeration to speak of the Ardennes as a mountain range. Certainly there is no comparison between them and the Alps.—ED.

## **Part III.**

THE CAMPAIGN FROM THE 1ST TO THE 18TH AUGUST,  
1870.

*(See Plan No. 3.)*

### **FIFTEENTH LETTER.**

THE STRATEGICAL DEPLOYMENT OF THE GERMAN ARMY  
UP TO AUGUST 6TH, 1870.

ONCE more we turn to a campaign in which the victor managed to hold success firmly in his grasp from the first, as events have proved : I mean the campaign of 1870. The measures taken in this campaign by the Supreme Command of the German army are of especial interest to us, not solely on account of the grand result of the war, affecting us so closely ; but they are even more instructive than previous campaigns, since the means by which the war was carried on are still in use. Although recent improvements in firearms may have somewhat affected tactics, the main arteries of strategy, the means of communication have remained the same. The railways, which had played so important a rôle in 1859, had in 1870 reached a degree of efficiency which since then we have not been able to increase materially. The other communications on the theatre of war were as numerous and practicable as the state of civilization of the country allowed, and it is doubtful if they will ever be sensibly increased or improved.

The manner in which the campaign was opened on the part of the Germans will, therefore, remain a standard pattern so long as new inventions do not create new

strategical means such as aeronautics might do. Do not think that I mean all future wars are to be measured by this war. A war in a country possessing fewer communications (roads and railroads), less favourable climatic conditions (heat or cold), a lower state of civilization and therefore offering fewer means of shelter and sustenance, will require modified measures in the initiatory stage. But the principles governing the operations will ever be the same as those which were practically demonstrated in 1870 by the German Supreme Command.

You ask why have I not made this campaign alone the subject of my observations, or, at any rate, why did I not begin with it? I was governed by the idea that a normal application of strategy is far less instructive than one in which reputedly able men have made mistakes, in accordance with the motto of General von Schreckenstein : *errando discimus*. It is only by the contemplation of the circumstances under which these mistakes were made, and of the causes producing these circumstances, that we learn how easy it is to fall into error. Only when we appreciate this will the investigation of strategical operations teach us how to avoid such faults.

If we inquire into nothing but the strategical conduct of a normal war, everything appears so simple, so clear, so easy, that we fail to note the difficulties that had to be overcome. If, after that, we inquire into faultily conducted wars, we are apt to shrug our shoulders contemptuously and attribute violations of the lessons which we have deduced, to gross ignorance. If, however, we appreciate from the beginning how easily even great men have fallen into strategical errors and how difficult therefore the correct practice of strategy must be, we are filled with the proper degree of admiration for that which has produced such great results and which must produce them whenever the enemy allows himself to be governed by different ideas. I think I have quite freely quoted Clausewitz's saying, " In war everything is simple, but the simple is

difficult." This is true of all measures in war, in tactics as well as in strategy, most of all in the latter. This is the reason why correct strategical measures appear so simple, plain, and commonplace, that we utterly fail to understand how it could possibly have been otherwise. The most profound truth, however, lies in the last four words, "the simple is difficult." For it is difficult beyond expression so to order everything that it will run smoothly.

We have seen, for instance, in the campaign of 1859, how much time Napoleon lost by not allowing his corps to act except as united bodies, and how Gyulai, by intermixing the troops of different corps according to the needs of the moment, rendered the mechanism of the command of the army more and more complex and difficult to work.

Forgive this digression into abstract ideas from which I meant to abstain, as my only intention was to deduce concrete lessons from accomplished facts. But there are truths so striking that one cannot resist giving them expression.

In considering the initial measures of the campaign on the part of the Germans, I shall base my observations to a great extent on the German Official Account, which describes the events in a manner as masterly as the events themselves.<sup>1</sup>

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I will first of all deal with the political situation of Germany in 1870, in so far as it bears upon strategy.

The events of 1866 had created a situation in Germany which no impartial spectator could regard as otherwise than transitory. Northern Germany, united under one head, with common representation, was leagued to the Southern states by separate treaties. Such treaties might cease upon stipulated notice, and did not bear the character of permanent institutions. Sooner or later the desire of the German peoples for a closer union would have to be deferred to, or the movement in this direction abandoned. This unity was not favourable to Napoleon's plans, who

<sup>1</sup> The references made are to the English translation.—ED.

owed his great influence in Europe to a system of politics based on the Roman principle of "*divide et impera*," and to that see-saw system which a Frenchman once commended to me as the "*chef d'œuvre de balance*." It caused a tension between the French and Prussian Governments, nourished by the former by means of inspired and simultaneously disavowed newspaper articles, and finding apt expression in the words "*revanche pour Sadowa*," as though the French had been our opponents at Königgrätz.

The tension which existed had found expression as early as 1867 in diplomacy on the occasion of the Luxemburg question. Napoleon's preference for peace was on that occasion prompted by two motives. One was the disordered condition of his army due to the unsuccessful expedition to Mexico, the other the desire not to disturb the proposed Exhibition at Paris, from which great material results were expected for the commerce of France. The agreement arrived at on the Luxemburg question was, therefore, more a temporary expedient than a removal of the friction. Not only might the smallest cause bring on the impending conflict, but it was to be expected that Napoleon would begin operations as soon as he had possessed himself of the necessary means.

His attempt in August, 1867, at Salzburg, after the Exhibition was over, to persuade Austria into active co-operation, was unsuccessful. Since then he relied upon the strength of France alone, and everything was done to put the French army into a condition promising success.

Hence, as you will probably remember, we were living in an armed peace from 1867 to 1870, and any one viewing the situation objectively had to admit that it was uncertain whether the end of the next six weeks would not see us in the midst of war. The rulers of our country, anticipating the impending conflict, made the necessary preparations, so as to be ready at any time for defence. Trade and business felt the pressure of the situation. Industry and commerce suffered under the resulting lack of confidence.



This state of affairs lasted almost three years, and men become accustomed to most things, even a state of uncertainty. Utopians were flattering themselves with the hope that our armed state would prevent war altogether, in accordance with the proverb: "*si vis pacem, para bellum.*" Thus it came about that the outbreak of war after all surprised our people. Even our highest statesmen did not believe, at the beginning of July, that war was so near. For our king was drinking the waters of Ems; the Chancellor was resting on his estate from parliamentary conflicts; the chief of the general staff was enjoying the fresh air of the Giant Mountains; many of our higher generals were taking advantage of the pause between the spring inspections and the great summer manœuvres to recuperate their health or enjoy themselves, when suddenly the storm broke loose.

My corps-commander was at St. Petersburg on a visit. The chief of the staff of our corps was on leave, a young major acting in his place. The troops were engaged in the exercises customary at this season. We of the artillery were instructing our recruits in target practice, and the whole army would have appeared to the layman as though dissolved into its atoms and without leaders. Suddenly Grammont's speech of July 6, 1870, roused the half-dormant passions of the French nation. The selection of the hereditary Prince of Hohenzollern for the throne of Spain gave the French Government a pretext for serious diplomatic steps, and even when these became without object by the withdrawal of the candidate, Napoleon continued in a more and more hostile strain, followed on 19th July by the declaration of war.

These things are still fresh in the memory of every one who then lived and thought, and I only recapitulate them, because I deduce from them this conclusion, that at first the international situation placed us politically on the defensive; at any rate, we were bound to believe that at first we should have to play that part. By his political

initiative Napoleon had on his side the advantages of energy and initiative. He acted with a quickness heretofore unusual with him. Before the Crimean war he had prepared the French nation by long diplomatic negotiations, working in the meantime upon public opinion, his then "Sixth Great Power," and getting his army ready. In 1859, he had delayed and made preparations from 1st January until May. In this instance the first unfriendly expressions were followed by the declaration of war within the short space of time between the 6th to the 19th July. Since the Emperor was known as a man of prudence and cool calculation, everybody thought that he had armed secretly and would fall upon us immediately after the declaration of war and interrupt the mobilization of our troops.

How did our strategists act? What did they do? What did they not do? It is proper here to enumerate some gross strategical sins which were very alluring, which most men would have committed and had committed in the past under similar circumstances, but which the Supreme Command of our army firmly and wisely avoided.

I would recall to you the state of mind of all of us, high and low, at that time. The first tidings of Grammont's speech were received with unbelief and shrugging of shoulders. No one thought that the French Government would make such a trivial matter the pretext for a great war. The daily increasing provocations, however, made it plain that a war for existence was imminent. When it finally became known on the memorable 15th July that the King was compelled to interrupt his course at Ems and that he would arrive at Berlin on the same evening, every one knew that war was at our door. And every one was firmly convinced that the French army was standing ready and would cross the frontier in a few days. If this was not meant as a politico-strategical surprise, why should diplomatic relations have been broken off so abruptly? Enormous crowds surged through the streets of Berlin in

the greatest excitement. No one thought of anything but that we were in imminent danger. Everywhere the conviction prevailed that the first thing to do was to send reinforcements to the few troops, still on peace footing, on the other side of the Rhine, against the expected attack of superior forces, and thus to protect the frontier which was entirely open there. This was not only the opinion of street politicians and of young officers easily excited and eager for war, I might name you prominent and influential generals who assembled their officers and made preparations to send the next day all the troops available on a peace footing, as they still were, to the Rhine by rail. The idea of doing with the Guard Corps what the Austrians did with their III. Corps in 1859, was in favour. The excitement increased from hour to hour, from minute to minute. Finally, at nine o'clock in the evening the king arrived. He was greeted with frenzied enthusiasm. It was only with difficulty that his carriage could pass through the masses of people thundering forth their enthusiastic applause. Such excitement is contagious. It affects the most sober men. Only a master mind remains cool at such times.

Our Government avoided the mistake of the Austrians in 1859. It never thought of sending the troops to the theatre of war unprepared and in dribblets, only to have them crushed by superior numbers. Coolly and deliberately the number of days was calculated which it would take the enemy to march from the frontier to some important objective, such as the fortresses on the Rhine, and how much damage he would be able to do to our country and our troops. With it was compared the time required for mobilizing our army, and it was hoped after deliberately completing the armament—during which time any decisive action was to be strictly avoided—to make up for whatever damage the enemy might have been able to inflict on us in the meantime. Firm in this conviction, unflinchingly adhering thereto, our Government stood among the billows of the general excitement like the immovable

rock which dashes into spray the breakers of a furious sea.

Hardly had the king returned, when on the same evening the telegraph carried into the most remote parts of the land the laconic words:—"Mobilize according to regulations; the 16th July is the first mobilization day."

These simple but grave words acted like a stream of cold water upon the fire of wild and phantastic projects kindled by enthusiasm. Everyone knew what the Government wanted, and saw that it knew what it wanted. I witnessed how the crowds surrounding the king's palace and yelling one continuous round of applause, suddenly quieted down and dispersed noiselessly, upon the news becoming known, and upon the information that the king had to go to work and needed quiet.

Everyone now had work for himself, for the hard work of mobilization had begun. The task was to prepare a force of more than half a million combatants, in which some millions of other men had to assist. Soon the railroads began to carry reserve and landwehr men and horses to the points of assembly, and, later on, mobilized troops to the threatened frontier.

In the meantime Bavaria had declared war against France on the day after the latter's declaration of war against Prussia, while Wurttemberg, Baden and Saxony proceeded to comply with the treaties previously concluded. Thus all Germany responded to the quiet decision of our king, and the princes and peoples presented to astonished Europe the spectacle of that unity of purpose of which the land, heretofore torn by discord, was believed incapable.

Forgive me for talking myself into this enthusiastic outburst sixteen years afterwards. But I cannot help it, when I think of those momentous events in which I was a participator.

What was to be the strategical plan of operations? I am firmly convinced that true to Napoleon's words, "*je n'ai jamais eu un plan d'operation*," the Supreme Commander

of our army did not not fix upon any, simply because he could not. Only a childlike conception of strategy can give credence to the story that Field-Marshal Count Moltke had planned the battles of Gravelotte—St. Privat and Sedan as early as the 15th July. (The Official Account also states expressly, page 50, “no plan of operation can with any safety include more than the first collision with the enemy’s main force.”)

In war everything is simple. The simple act required was to assemble the army on the threatened frontier to ward off the assailant. Should the army succeed in assembling without being attacked by the enemy, which was hardly to be expected, it would be time enough to turn toward the point where he had concentrated his forces, attack, and defeat them. The political situation imposed upon us the defensive. But as a vigorous tactical defence cannot be conceived without offensive counter strokes, so the strategical defensive must eventually change to the offensive as soon as sufficient strength has been gathered. For a rigid, continuous defence will ever end in ruin. This we have seen in the continuous defensive of Gyulai in the Lomellina. Hence the immediate task of the strategist was to fix upon a place where to assemble the army, i.e. to select the place for the strategical deployment which, here, was not so plainly indicated as, it was in 1859 for the Austrian offensive, which could only proceed from the frontier-line formed by Ticino.

Presuming neutrality on the part of Belgium, Luxemburg, and Switzerland, the possibility of a conflict between the French and German land-armies was limited to the space between Luxemburg and Switzerland. The country to be covered stretched some 95 miles east and west in a straight line from Perl to Lauterburg and was without strategical or tactical obstacle, and from Lauterburg to Basle for about the same distance, at right angles to the former and along the strong barrier of the Rhine. Al-

together more than 190 miles of frontier had to be covered, an extent undoubtedly too great for an army of 500,000 men to hold at every point. To this must be added that the direction of the frontier was unfavourable; for should the enemy assemble his army in the apex of the angle, perhaps in the vicinity of Hagenau, he could break through before we could concentrate our forces stationed along it, and then beat them in detail.

Hence we could only cover directly either the northern half of the frontier Perl-Lauterburg, or the southern, Lauterburg-Basle. The latter is especially promising for the defensive, bordered as it is by the Rhine, which would require considerable time to cross. But the same loss of time would have been occasioned by the Rhine in a change from the defensive to the offensive. This district, moreover, was more distant from the heart of Germany, connected with the same by fewer lines of railroad, and hence it would have required much more time for the deployment than on the frontier Perl-Lauterburg. The latter, owing to the greater number of available railroads, permitted of a more rapid concentration of the army, and, the strategical deployment once completed, of a more sudden transition to the offensive. Either position left part of the frontier uncovered. If the army were assembled between Lauterburg and Basle, the road to the heart of Germany was left uncovered, while a concentration along the frontier Perl-Lauterburg, although uncovering the southern Rhine frontier, endangered the whole of Germany to a less degree.

The memoir on the subject of this strategical deployment (submitted during the winter 1868-69) so far as it is quoted in the Official Account, explains much better than I am able to do the reasons why the concentration of the army on the frontier Perl-Lauterburg was preferable. It explains why Germany may expect the neutrality of Belgium, Holland, and Switzerland to be respected by France in the latter's own interest, if only for the purpose

of not unnecessarily increasing the number of her opponents. In calculating the forces it placed those of the North German Confederation at 330,000 men, those of France at 250,000 at the beginning and at 343,000 later, when the reserves should have joined. It suggests therefore the advisability of turning this superiority to account by celerity of action. (You see the importance of Blume's views with regard to the time required for assembling the forces for the decisive blow.) The memorandum shows also how much greater would be the numerical superiority, if the southern states joined Northern Germany.

As to the time required for completing the strategical deployment of the German army, it was calculated that on the tenth day the first detachments of the mobilized army corps would begin to detrain at the frontier and reinforce the troops mobilized there, that on the 13th day two army corps, on the 18th day 300,000 men would be assembled, and that on the 20th day they would be equipped with nearly all their trains and be ready for offensive operations.

I have said that the 16th July was the first day of mobilization. On the 4th of August, the 20th day of mobilization, active operations were begun with the taking of Weissenburg. On the 6th of August, the 22nd day of mobilization, the battles of Wörth and Saarbrücken were fought.

We perceive from this on how solid a basis the dates were calculated in the German army. Now that we know that no illusions were indulged in or risks of disappointment incurred, we are not in a position to criticize and ferret out if the army might not have been assembled with greater rapidity. For in order to verify the possibility of a more rapid concentration, it would require an examination of the then plans of mobilization and of all the railway time-tables, and an independent calculation of the time based upon the capacity of each railroad in those days. I for one am willing to dispense with such an

undertaking, which furthermore I consider impossible now. In view of the indefatigable activity and the prudence exhibited by our general staff, I rest satisfied in the conviction that, if it had been in any way possible to complete the strategical deployment in less time, even by one single day, the staff would have done it.

The calculation of the time within which the enemy might assemble his forces is, in the memoir referred to, based upon less reliable data. It states the lack of experience on the part of the enemy as to the time required for mobilizing the whole French army, as, since the era of the First Napoleon, France had known but partial mobilizations, in which the army in the field was kept up from the troops remaining at home. On the whole the memoir presumes that France would not be able to assemble all her forces in less time than Germany. It also presumes that the army would be assembled where it could be most rapidly concentrated to meet the German army, i.e. on the line between Metz and Strassburg, thus basing its considerations on the presumption that the enemy, too, would do that which was the most natural and simple, i.e. the best. This is an important indication of the rule which should be observed in strategical deployment.

At the same time the memoir does not fail to consider the possibility of the enemy's disregarding this view and taking other measures; but in proving that the enemy would then find himself in a less favourable position it demonstrates that the strategical deployment of the French army on the line Perl-Lauterburg is the best.

The enemy, the memorandum says, may not wait for the augmentation of his army, but cross the frontier at an early date, with an army of 150,000 men. It assumes that this might be done on the 8th day of our own mobilization. In that case, states the memoir, the troops should not be transported by rail beyond the Rhine, and the advanced troops should strictly avoid any conflict with the enemy; the German army would stand ready on the Rhine on the



14th day, and the improvised French army could not arrive there at an earlier date, as it would require six marches from the French frontier to the Rhine, where it would be met and crushed by an army more than twice its size.

The French army might also concentrate in two isolated parts at Metz and at Strassburg. In that case the German forces in the Palatinate would stand between them and could turn on either with a crushing superiority. Furthermore, the French army might cross the southern part of the Franco-German frontier. In that case the German army—but not before it had been completely assembled—could throw itself upon the opponent, either on the left Rhine-bank or on the right, according to the situation, and force him to give battle under the worst conditions imaginable, that is, with his line of retreat seriously endangered.

You reply that here I am contradicting my former statement that if the only three possible cases were provided for, a fourth invariably happens. Here the three possible cases were successfully provided for. Yet, I may tell you the fourth case did actually occur. Only it happened to be favourable to the German army. For it came to pass that long after the completion of our own strategical deployment the French army was neither complete in numbers nor ready to begin operations. Had this been thought possible on our side, our general staff would have acted less cautiously than it did.

The possibility of a descent on the North Sea and Baltic coasts, feasible on account of the superiority of the French fleet, were also considered in the memorandum. Remarkable is the sentence in the Official Account (p. 56): "A descent on the part of the French, if intended at all, was to be expected at the beginning of the war, as such far-reaching enterprises must naturally cease as soon as we had invaded French soil." Therefore, local troops (reserve and garrison troops) and landwehr were held in readiness until the railroads were open for their transport to France,

by which time, as above remarked, all danger of a French landing would have ceased.

Please to note the difference in the conception of the Austrian strategy of 1859 and the German of 1870. By rumours of an intended descent the former was misled into retaining two corps on the Adriatic coast and withholding them from the decisive theatre. The latter determined to render nugatory the coast attack by success on the more important area of conflict. Of course, there is an essential difference between the case of 1859 and 1870. In 1859 the French might have hoped to bring about an insurrection by a landing, and the Austrians were apprehensive of it. In 1870 Napoleon perhaps indulged in the illusion that a descent on the North German coast would raise an insurrection in Hanover. We certainly did not apprehend this. In any event, as I told you in one of my former letters, the best safeguard against an insurrection consists in defeating the enemy's field army and carrying the war into his country, because no insurrection would then dare raise its head.

I cannot refrain from inviting your attention to an important sentence of this memoir. It says (see p. 53): "If then the deployment in the Palatinate and on the Mosel (line Perl-Lauterburg) be conceded as possible, no objection based upon the apparent denudation of our Rhine frontier can well be made against assembling *all* available forces *there*."

After the war of 1866 an essay appeared in the *Militaer Wochenblatt*, the authorship of which is generally ascribed to our Chief of the Staff. It expresses itself about our preparations for the battle of Koeniggrätz to the following effect: "Thus all available forces were brought up for the decisive action. Not a man remained detached for secondary purposes, such perhaps as the observation of fortresses (Josephstadt)." As at Koeniggrätz strategy assembled all available forces for tactical purposes, so, on a larger scale, it assembled in 1870 all the forces available for

the strategical deployment at the point selected as favourable, in order to work by strategical means from that initial point toward a tactical decision.

You see that the plan of operation, if we may so call the proposition of 1868-69, only contemplates the strategical deployment of the army. It was adhered to in 1870 when war broke out. The unconditional and immediate accession of the South German princes to the North German Confederation was the only modification of the plan during its execution, and this had also been taken into consideration in it. This accession and this considerable addition to the German forces might have led us into the covering the Baden-Alsace Rhine frontier from Lauterberg to Basle by the concentration of the South German troops between Offenburg and Freiburg. This temptation to disperse our forces the Supreme Command of our army withstood by adhering to the principle of concentrating all available forces at the decisive point. The South German troops were assembled on the Franco-Palatinate frontier, while the Rhine frontier Lauterburg-Basle was observed only by a few troops, being denuded of all forces worth mentioning. In this manner we guarded against weakening our main forces for secondary purposes, and willingly took the risk of giving the enemy the opportunity for invading Southern Germany by leaving this flank uncovered. For by putting up with this relatively small disadvantage we knew that, should the enemy undertake the invasion, the damage done would be counterbalanced by the defeat of his main force and the subsequent destruction of the invading host.

As on the part of the Supreme Command of the German army it required some greatness of mind to adhere unflinchingly to what had been recognized as correct, so the self-denial and sacrifice of the South German states must also be acknowledged. They willingly exposed their own countries to a hostile invasion for the better defence of the German Fatherland at large. They consented to such a

use of their own troops as left their own possessions denuded and open to the foe, so that they could only be protected by an offensive concentration on the flank of the threatening enemy. The Official Account specially acknowledges this devotion to the common cause and this confidence in the Supreme Command (p. 51).

Such devotion and such confidence are certainly rare among allies. (Compare it with the action of the Saxons before Jena, when asked to expose their frontier.)

You may say perhaps that the plan of operation did not employ all the available forces of Germany for the strategical deployment on the line Perl-Lauterburg, for the I. and II. and VI. Corps, the 17th Infantry Division, the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, and Guard Landwehr Divisions were not disposed of in the beginning, i.e. more than 160,000 men. But these troops could not be brought to the theatre of war until the railroads, fully occupied by the other corps, became available. Until then things might happen which would greatly modify their use. Strictly adhering to the principle of not making plans for too long a period in advance, these troops were at first sent only so far westward as the railroads were free, the I. and II. Corps to Berlin, the VI. to Görlitz and Breslau, the Guard Landwehr Division to Hanover, the 17th Division to Hamburg, the 2nd Landwehr Division to Bremen, the 1st and 3rd to the railway stations from Posen and Tilsit to Magdeburg.

Furthermore, if you think that the Supreme Commander of our army must have had some general plan before the opening of the campaign—for instance, that of pushing the enemy's main force off its line of communication in a northerly direction—I must refer you to the map which shows that the facts raise well-founded doubts as to the framing of any such plan of operation.<sup>1</sup> The front of the strategical deployment behind the line Perl-Lauterburg

<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the Official Account, p. 50, calls this "the leading idea."—ED.

faces almost due south and is directly opposite the presumed strategical deployment of the enemy. If the Germans advanced on the offensive in a straight line, they would push the enemy's main force off Paris in a southerly direction rather than northward. It is only after the success of the battles on the 6th August that the plan of turning the southern flank of the French main forces and pushing them northward could be adopted at German headquarters. For on the 6th August MacMahon's army was so thoroughly defeated, that in its flight—favoured as it was by the use of railroads—it did not pause until it arrived at Châlons, while at Spicheren only a small part of the army was defeated and the rest still deserved respect. It was these events that opened to the German army the country south of Metz for a flanking movement, while a turning movement north of Metz would have jammed the army in a dangerous position between this fortress and the Luxemburg frontier, where the fortress of Diedenhofen would have impeded operations.

The statements of the Official Account that the German headquarters had considered the idea of holding the French main army (should it take position behind the line Diedenhofen-Metz) in front by the first army and turning it in the south by the second army agree with views above expressed. But the idea was not allowed to expand into a settled plan, and care was taken not to communicate it to the army commanders until the time for its execution had arrived.

In the plan of operation geographical points, as Paris for instance, were not considered. The Official Account says expressly: "No plan of operations can with safety go beyond the first meeting with the enemy's main forces," and the memorandum names as the immediate object of operation: "to find the main body of the enemy and assail it wherever found." Hence the only geographical point considered was that where the enemy's main body would be met.

Thus the choice of the front of the strategical deploy-

ment depended upon that chosen by the enemy, which would probably be that most favourable to him. If this be once recognized and the enemy does not carry out what we think he should, so much the better for us.

The expression of the first Napoleon which I have frequently quoted : "*je n'ai jamais eu un plan d'opération,*" means the same and only expresses it in a more drastic form. He concentrated his army at the right place and then advanced upon the enemy. When he found him, he decided what measures he would take to turn or outflank the enemy or break his centre, i.e. operations on exterior or interior lines.

This deployment at the right spot is the great object of all strategical wisdom and the starting point of all subsequent strategy.

In saying this I am in accord with the Official Account where it says (p. 49) : "Errors in the original assembly of the army can scarcely ever be rectified during the course of the campaign." And if you think that in this my statement I have simply translated this sentence of the Official Account into other words, I shall not contradict you.

I cannot drop this memorandum of the general staff without inviting your attention to the time when it was written. It was in the winter from 1868 to 1869, about a year and a half before the war broke out. It was the time when we were most anxious for peace for the purpose of consolidating our home affairs, but when, on account of the jealousy of the French Emperor, we had to expect sudden attack, as I have stated at the beginning of this letter. Thus the Headquarters Staff in the conscientious performance of its duties strictly adhered to the Roman maxim "*si vis pacem, para bellum.*" Is this not sufficient to inspire you with confidence that our army leaders will do the same thing in the future, and to believe that even now they are prepared for all events? Should it not banish the apprehension which makes itself felt whenever there is a little cloud on our political horizon?

But if our late opponents were to conclude from the contents of the memorandum that we were then contemplating war, it would be simply ridiculous. For if that had been the case we should have made war at the beginning of 1869 instead of waiting a year and a half, by which time the French army had recovered from the disorganization caused by the Mexican adventure, and was newly organized. They attempted to surprise us when they thought us least prepared.

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After this digression into the "haute politique" of the past and future, let us investigate how the strategical deployment was actually carried out.

The movements by railroad necessary to put the army on a war footing, which began with the first day of mobilization, were immediately followed by those which carried the mobilized troops to the places assigned to them on the plan of the strategical deployment. The troops mobilized on the immediate theatre of war and those in garrison near by reached their destinations by foot marches. The troops garrisoned near the frontier were left to guard the latter.

The railroads available consisted of six lines from Northern Germany and three lines from Southern Germany, by which troops could be brought to the Palatinate; every double line could dispatch daily 18, every single line 12 trains. According to the time-tables, the three armies were to be ready to take the offensive by the third day of August.

The First Army (VII. and VIII. Corps, 3rd Cavalry Division) in the vicinity of Merzig-Saarlouis.

The Second Army (Guards, III., IV., and X. Corps, 5th and 6th Cavalry Divisions) in the vicinity of Völklingen and Saarbrücken and toward Saargemünd.

The Third Army (V. and XI. Corps, I. and II. Bavarian Corps, Wurttemberg and Baden Divi-

sions, 4th Cavalry Division) in the vicinity of Karlsruhe and Landau.

In their rear as reserves the XII. and IX. Corps near Kaiserslautern, Homburg and Zweibrücken.

The other troops (I., II., and VI. Corps, 1st and 2nd Cavalry Divisions) were, as stated, still waiting until the railroads should become available to move them.

The first troops finished their mobilization by the 23rd July, and their transport began the next day. They were on their way when the following disposition of the enemy became known :—

One corps was assembling at St. Avold, three corps at Diedenhofen, Metz, and Nancy, one corps at Bitsch, one corps at Strassburg, one corps at Belfort, one corps at Châlons. Two divisions were retained at Paris. It was thought that they were intended for a naval expedition. It was calculated that at the time (24th July) the French army could advance on the offensive from the foremost of the points named with 162,500 infantry, on 29th July with 172,900, after the 29th with 227,500. As a matter of fact, after a few unimportant conflicts between the light troops observing each other, large bodies of the French advanced from Forbach and Saargemund against Saarbrücken as early as 27th July.

Thus it was possible for the enemy to disturb the strategical deployment of the German army on the frontier by advancing a force of more than 150,000 men into the Palatinate. Hence the troops could not be detrained there in the face of the danger of being met as they arrived by superior forces of the enemy. The deployment of the Second Army was therefore modified and ordered to take place on the Rhine nearly in the manner provided for in the memorandum of 1868-69 in the case of our being anticipated by the enemy's offensive, a supposition which was daily expected to be verified.

But on the 28th July the enemy only made a demon-



stration against Saarbrück, contenting himself with artillery fire, and withdrew his troops from the frontier on 29th July. Every day of inactivity on the part of the enemy made it more probable that the strategical deployment could be made near the frontier as originally intended. The Supreme Commander of our armies now acted with as much decision as prudence in carrying out the original idea. The advanced troops already on the frontier were ordered to avoid any decisive action. But as soon as sufficient troops had arrived by railway between Mainz and Mannheim, which, together with others which had come up by road during the time of railway transport, gave a force sufficient to meet the enemy with confidence, as the latter had still some days to march before he could reach the Germans, the troops already detrained were put in march for their original destinations and the points of detrainment of the troops following in rear were advanced farther to the front.

In case of an offensive on the part of the enemy the armies were assigned defensive positions farther and farther to the front as eventual points of assembly. For instance, the Second Army had assigned to it the line Alsenz-Marienthal-Grünstadt, afterward the position of Kaiserslautern. When, however, the reconnaissance in force of large French forces—undertaken with much noise and show, before which the four battalions at Saarbrück retired fighting—was not followed by a serious offensive, the Second Army was directed to complete its deployment in front of the wooded district of Kaiserslautern. In this manner little time was lost by the measures of prudence rendered necessary by the enemy's demonstration.

The above is the general idea underlying the strategical deployment from the 24th July to the 6th August. I will not trouble you with details. Moreover, I could only copy the statements of the Official Account. If you are interested in it, you can look up these points in it (see p. 49, *et seq.*).

Daily changes in the movement tables sometimes

placed the troops in peculiar situations, which were, however, of no evil consequence, and, at most, excited merriment. For instance, I was assigned to the train which was to carry the headquarters of the Guard Corps from Berlin to the frontier. We were to move on the evening of the 30th July, and according to the table we were to end our journey after two days' travel at Homburg in the Palatinate. But in the meantime our destination had been changed by telegraph from Berlin without our knowledge. Part of our journey was over another line. We passed stations not mentioned in our time tables. The road was unknown to us. The engine-driver answered our questions with a shrug of his shoulders, and the laconic reply, "Change ordered by telegram from Berlin." Our meal times were also changed; dinner took place at midnight, supper in the morning, breakfast in the evening. On the evening of the 1st August the train came to a halt at a station. Our Quartermaster (he too had not been forgotten by the provident general staff) stood on the platform. The order was given to detrain. "Where are we?" The answer was "In Mannheim." There we found detailed orders for concentration on the Rhine. Now we had some prospect of rest. Arrangements were therefore made for accustoming the reservists, who wore new hard boots, to marching. We remained quiet on the 2nd August. But on the evening of that day orders were suddenly received to advance, although the whole of the corps had not yet arrived. On the 3rd August we marched to Dürkheim, on the 4th through the Hardt Mountains to Kaiserslautern. How surprised we were to find bivouacking there the Cavalry Division, which had been entrained at Berlin two days after us! They had detrained at Kaiserslautern during the night. Moreover, in the course of the afternoon, the ammunition columns of our corps actually began to leave the station of Kaiserlautern.

On the 5th August the corps, now ready for active operations, marched to Landstuhl; on the 6th to Homburg, the original terminus of our transport by rail.

On a former occasion I expressed the idea that the political and strategical initiative gained by Napoleon, declaring war on July 19 and making demonstrations against Saarbrück as early as the 26th July, affected our movements so much that the assumption of the offensive was delayed five days. The Official Account also mentions that considerations of the possibility of an offensive movement by the enemy delayed our operations several days. The actual delay was, however, not so great as I thought at the time. For instance, the cavalry division of the Guard Corps could not have detrained at Homburg before the 4th August, the day it actually did. The corps therefore could not have been complete and ready for action at Homburg before the 4th August. Hence two days at the most were lost. In order to judge whether things were the same with the main body of the army, we should have to undertake the tedious work of comparing all the original time-tables with the movements actually carried out, which is now impossible, the material for doing so being no longer available. But I think it safe to assume that the delay was the same throughout, because the Guard Corps reached the place originally assigned to it at the same time as the rest of the army.

Still a delay of two days is of great importance. In the campaign of 1859 we saw that a difference of one day is sufficient to decide or lose battles, and this goes again to prove the correctness of my frequent remark that in war the assumption of the initiative and offensive, in strategy as well as in tactics, hinders the enemy and is favourable to our own interests, though it may not be exactly the best thing that might have been done. The lack of energy is always objectionable.

The delay referred to did us no harm, because the French army was not complete nor ready for active

operations, and because the Supreme Commander of our army had in the meantime been in readiness to assume the offensive at any moment and made this his particular object.

The security of the frontier was guarded not by troops intended to give battle while exposed to the risk of defeat by superior numbers, but by the 5th and 6th Cavalry Divisions being sent to the front to veil our movements and ascertain those of the enemy.

Here for the first time in this century large bodies of cavalry were charged with this strategically important task which I have sufficiently discussed in my former letters.

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It still remains to discuss an internal detail of the German arrangements, viz. the sub-division of the forces into three separate armies. The Official Account says on this point, that a force like the one to be placed in the field against France could only operate when divided into separate bodies.

We saw the division into three armies in Bohemia in 1866. In 1866 the Austrian forces on the same theatre of war were not divided into several armies, nor were they in 1859. In 1870 the French forces were at first organized in a single army, for though MacMahon commanded more than his own corps at Wörth, his command over the other forces was but provisional, he had no separate staff, nor did another general take command of his particular corps.

It would almost seem as though three armies had been the rule with the Prussians. During the course of the campaign, however, this number was not adhered to: toward the end we had the Third Army, the Meuse Army, the First Army, the Second Army, the detachments under the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg, and Manteuffel's force, or six in all. The obvious question is: What regulates

the division of the forces into armies? How strong should an army be?

The division of the forces on the same theatre of war into armies becomes necessary, when they are so large that the work of directing them promptly and uniformly can no longer be carried out by one central authority, i.e. when the number of army corps is so great as to require too much time to admit of the timely transmittal of orders to them and of their execution. This was one of the causes of the extraordinary length of Gyulai's instructions.

If you further consider from this point of view Benedek's dispositions in 1866, who, in addition to directing the trains, had to give orders daily to 8 corps, 5 cavalry divisions, and the reserve artillery, i.e. 14 separate units directly subordinate to him, you will readily perceive that it cannot be done. For the orders for each corps must be carefully considered, compared with the map, planned out accordingly, the exact wording laid down, written out, and then copied fifteen times. With the exception of the copying, all this must be carefully supervised and approved by one man, otherwise incongruities might slip into the arrangements.

Napoleon I., who, of all the generals of the past few hundred years, had most experience in the command of armies, is said to have stated that much more than 100,000 men could not very well be commanded by one man. Bookmen have deduced from this the peculiar conclusion that an army becomes weaker as it exceeds the number of 100,000 men; others have based upon it the expediency of appointing an army commander for every 100,000 men.

But as we have stated, the necessity of a division into armies depends not so much upon the number of combatants as on the number of subordinate units corps and independent divisions. Not to mention the fact that even

a small number of corps united for common action cannot do without a supreme commander.

How many subordinate commands can be managed by one army command? In a general way you will find that in the course of practice all armies have so subdivided their troops that in the field of tactics each command gives orders to from three to six subordinate commands. A battalion has from four to six companies, a regiment of infantry three or four battalions, a regiment of cavalry from four to six squadrons (the eight squadrons in the Austrian Husar regiments have been found too numerous and have been reduced). Brigades are formed of two or three regiments. A division gives orders to two infantry brigades, one brigade division of artillery and one regiment of cavalry, i.e. four subordinate commands. The corps disposes of two (sometimes three) divisions, the corps artillery, sometimes a cavalry division or brigade, and the trains, i.e. four to six units.

The instructions which an army corps commander receives from the army command are not, as a rule, of such a nature that the execution must take place at once, as is often the case in the smaller tactical units; the superior command has somewhat more time, and the transmission of orders is greatly assisted by the invention of the field telegraph. Thus it came about that, in the war of 1870, the army headquarters had frequently more than six subordinate commands, without detriment to the whole. Blume says, without giving theoretical reasons, that more than five army corps with an appropriate number of cavalry divisions could hardly be directed as one body; he adds, however: "The strength of armies depends not only on the task assigned to them but upon the nature of the theatre of war and the quality of the leaders." This strategical principle is deduced from our experience in 1870-71.

We had the First Army, consisting of the VII. and VIII. Corps and one cavalry division, to which was afterwards

added the I. Corps and another cavalry division, three to five subordinate commands.

The Second Army consisted of six corps and two cavalry divisions, i.e. eight subordinate commands. The II. Corps, arriving later on, increased this number to nine.

The Third Army consisted of two Prussian, two Bavarian corps, two separate contingents (Baden and Wurttemberg) and one cavalry division, later on two. Thus it gave orders to seven or eight subordinate commands. When the Baden division was detached for the siege of Strassburg, the VI. Corps took its place.

The management of nine subordinate commands in the Second Army seems to have proved difficult, for after the capitulation of Metz it was not continued. Still, during the latter part of the investment of Metz, Prince Frederick Charles had to control a still greater number of subordinate commanders. In view of the comparatively little movement during an investment, these could be efficiently managed by means of telegraphic communication. But as soon, however, as the troops were put in motion after the capitulation of Metz, they had to be again divided into two armies. This is what Blume is thinking of when he says that the strength of armies depends upon the task assigned them and the character of the theatre of war.

I cannot refrain from mentioning that the division into corps greatly lightens the work of the army commander when, as in 1870, he is relieved of seeing daily to the issue of rations and other supplies. This is the business of the corps commander, while the army commander only gives instructions, arranges for supplies in general, and establishes dépôts to which the corps send for the supplies needed. I have before discussed this point in detail when speaking of the campaign of 1859, and again draw your attention to the fact that by such decentralization the supplies are more certain than when the

details for the whole are regulated from the headquarters of the army. I will only remind you of the many millions of rations of bread which Benedek had accumulated at Pardubitz, and which became mouldy before they were issued to the men.

The advantage to be derived from a rational subdivision of the forces into several armies is made manifest by comparing the clearness and brevity of the orders emanating from German Great Headquarters in 1870 with the long-winded, endless, and obscure dispositions of Gyulai and Benedek.

To instruct the Third Army as to the offensive movement which was to prevent MacMahon from crossing the Rhine and protect Baden from invasion, and which led ultimately to the battle of Wörth, a telegram of six lines sufficed. The details were talked over with a general staff officer who was sent there and was familiar with the intentions of the supreme commander. If Gyulai's staff had had to arrange something similar, they would have worked out instructions covering six printed pages.

You may perhaps think that the orders issued from the several army headquarters in 1870 were as lengthy as those of Gyulai and Benedek. This was by no means the case. The orders issued by the commander of the Third Army in pursuance of the telegram referred to on the 3rd August, fill only a page and a half, and the dispositions of the 5th August, which led to the battle of Wörth, occupy half a printed page. The orders of Prince Frederick Charles for the battle of Gravelotte and St. Privat were issued orally to the assembled commanding generals near Mars La Tour at 5 a.m. on the 18th August, and, having been present myself, I know that they did not take more than a quarter of an hour.

In discussing the war of 1859 we found that Gyulai's dispositions contained many things which might have been left to the corps, that they frequently contained provisions for future contingencies which were useless as



things turned out, and that they should have been drawn up in a much more short, precise, and intelligible manner. The chief cause of the length and lack of intelligibility of the Austrian orders was the unfortunate organization of the force into too great a number of subordinate commands. A further consequence of this was the interference in details which the supreme commander of an army would do better to avoid.

Thus we perceive that a cumbersome organization, acting like a heavy chain, contributed greatly to the non-success of the two luckless commanders in 1859 and 1866.

I mentioned before that the troops from the extreme north and east of Prussia for which the railways could not at first be used, as well as those troops which only finished their mobilization later (I., II., and VI. Corps, 17th Division, and 4 Landwehr Divisions), were held in readiness for transport, and that the Official Account shows that these troops were forwarded as soon as the lines became available. Thus, I may say, not a minute was lost, nor a single man uselessly detached, and everything possible was done to assemble forthwith on the decisive points all available troops. It is true the memorandum before mentioned placed the strength of the French army at 343,000 men only, and that of the German army, inclusive of the South Germans and the I., II., and VI. Corps, at 484,000 men. But in order to increase the probability of German success, the Supreme Commander ordered the four Landwehr Divisions to be forwarded as soon as practicable, following out the maxim that for a decisive battle one can never be too strong.

The concentration of such large numbers of men within so limited a space could not but give rise to apprehension as to the possibility of providing food for them all. While the railroads were almost exclusively occupied in transporting the troops, only limited supplies could be brought up by them. Nor could it be assumed that during the first period subsistence could be brought into the Palatinate through

the ordinary channels of trade. For contractors could no more use the railroads than the commissariat could. Could the Palatinate maintain such an army for any length of time? The front of the deployment from Merzig to Lauterburg (for the country Perl-Merzig cannot be considered on account of its inaccessibility) extended about 81 miles. If the army were distributed over a depth of 28½ miles, it would cover a space of 2300 square miles. The land is not rich. The wooded hills of the Hardt withdraw many square miles from productiveness for army purposes. I do not think that the population can be put at more than 90 per square mile. It could not be assumed that without importing supplies the populace would be able to maintain three times its own number of men for several days or weeks, especially just before the harvest. For an army of 484,000 combatants musters at least 600,000 mouths to feed and the country had only about 200,000 inhabitants.

The Supreme Command, aware of this, made extensive arrangements for establishing magazines, which are enumerated in the Official Account. But it did not rest satisfied with this, for it had to take into consideration that at a time when all the roads were covered with troops on the march, the wagons would have great difficulty in going to and coming from the magazines. For this reason the troops were ordered to provide themselves before entraining with five days' rations for men and horses for a transit lasting two days. They would thus have at least three days' rations on detraining—I say at least three days, for, as is well known, the horses do not eat their full rations in the train, while for the men wherever it was found practicable, meals were provided beforehand at the stopping stations. Thus it was impossible that the troops, on detraining, could be placed in positions where they would forthwith suffer from hunger, as those unfortunate Austrian battalions did at the bridge-head of San Martino in the war of 1859.

These extensive precautions proved valuable, for, in truth, the means of subsistence were so thoroughly eaten up in the Palatinate that, when the troops passed on, a famine was imminent. Since everything obtained from them had been paid for in cash, the inhabitants had money, but nothing to eat, nor was there anyone who had anything to sell. Fortunately the railroads became free in time to prevent disaster by replacing the produce consumed. You see how carefully the Supreme Commander provided not only for the soldiers, but also for the inhabitants. This should always be in one's own country.

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I am prepared for a charge of inconsistency when I say that our leaders, avoiding all decisive engagements, steadily completed the strategical deployment, and that it was terminated on the 6th August, whereas the engagement of Weissenburg took place on 4th August, and the battles of Wörth and Spicheren on the 6th.

But the strategical deployment, although the first consideration at the beginning of operations, is not the ultimate object, but the starting point for further operations and enterprises, undertaken according to circumstances and the enemy's counter-measures, which cannot be foreseen. If in the course of carrying it out an opportunity offers for a successful and perhaps fairly decisive undertaking, it would be foolish pedantry to let it slip, simply because the deployment is not entirely completed.

Patrols sent forward confirmed the news that the forces of MacMahon were gathering between Strassburg and Weissenburg, and were inferior in numbers to the Third Army assembled north of the Lauter. An advance of this army to the south was here all the more feasible since it would be the best means of protecting the lines of the Rhine from Lauterburg to Basle against invasion by MacMahon's army, and of performing the plain duty of the

North to cover South Germany, which had so willingly consented to have her frontier left unprotected. (In the telegram from the Supreme Commander this is expressly stated as the object of this offensive.) The engagement of Weissenburg and the battle of Wörth are therefore to be looked upon as "*hors d'œuvre*," not contained in the original plan, and which, by reason of the unexpectedly decisive success against a part of the hostile forces, furnished a basis for those extensive operations against the enemy's main body which culminated in the decisive battle of Gravelotte and Mars-La-Tour.

The battle of Spicheren, as regards its strategical origin, the intentions of both sides, and its material results, is nothing but an accidental encounter arising from the proximity of the deployment fronts of the two opponents. It remained without direct material result, however great the moral effect and with it the indirect material result may have been, of an action in which our troops took by frontal attack rocky precipices which the defender considered not only impregnable, but absolutely inaccessible.

In any case, a rational manner of leading the armies will not separate, invariably and pedantically, the stage of strategical deployment from that of active operations, in point of time. Still, we have had such a separation before. Napoleon, as we have seen, gave his army two days of rest in 1806 after completing the assembly of his troops, in order to prepare them for the coming struggle. But when active operations take place simultaneously with deployment, if an opportunity offer for a favourable offensive, it would be a foolish sin of omission to forego such a possibility of success.

I have assumed that the strategical deployment of the troops intended for the first operations was completed on the 6th August.

The memorandum of 1868-69 contemplated a deployment of the First Army (2 corps) near Wittlich, of the

Second Army (4 corps) near Neunkirchen-Homburg, of the Third Army near Landau and Rastatt. The timetables of 1870 (the carrying capacity of the railroads had increased in the intervening time) contemplated the assembly, by 3rd August, of the First Army (2 corps and 1 cavalry division) near Merzig and Saarlouis, of the Second (4 corps and 2 cavalry divisions) near Völklingen and Saarbrück toward Saargemünd, of the Third near Landau, behind the Klingenbach and near Karlsruhe. In rear of the Second Army the IX. Corps was to be in reserve at Homburg, the XII. near Kaiserslautern.

On the 6th August, 3 days later, these armies stood, in fact, somewhat in advance of these places:

The First Army (2 corps) near Petite Rosselle and Spicheren, about 5 miles in front of the line of the Saar.

The Second Army (4 corps) near Saarbrücken, Spicheren, and Neunkirchen (III.), Zweibrücken, (IV.), Homburg (Guards) and Waldmohr (X.).

The Third Army, victorious, at Wörth (24 miles in front of the Klingenbach).

Two corps (IX. and XII.) were near Landstuhl and Kaiserslautern respectively, in rear of the first line of the Second Army.

The troops, which in the meantime had stood ready along the railways, began to arrive on the theatre of war on the 6th August; the I. Corps at Tholey to reinforce the Second Army, while parts of the VI. Corps assembled at Landau to follow the Third Army. The II. Corps was still on the way.

Thus, in comparison with the original plan of operation, the army had lost a few days by the enemy's intervention, but was really stronger, having been victorious in the fights which had taken place. The movements brought about by the engagements mentioned had, it is true, divided it into two parts, but these were now in themselves more concentrated. For the First and Second Armies together had a front of only 24 miles in a straight line, and 28½ miles from their left

flank stood the Third Army assembled at Wörth after the battle. (Total front 53 miles.)

Thus the first object of the operations of the German army was its strategical deployment, and, avoiding in the beginning a conflict with superior numbers, it even put up with some delay. But as soon as it felt itself strong enough, it fought for its deployment wherever necessary, and never let slip an opportunity of gaining success.

Whoever knows what he wants, is superior to him who does not. This obtains in strategy even more than in ordinary life.

Strategy should therefore adhere to that aim which has once been recognized as sound, although not abstaining from such temporary modifications as are rendered needful by the enemy's action, but invariably returning to the original object, which is thus pretty sure to be attained.

## SIXTEENTH LETTER.

### THE STRATEGICAL DEPLOYMENT OF THE FRENCH ARMY UP TO AUGUST 6, 1870.

IN comparing the strategical deployment of the German forces with that of the French, I had perhaps better keep to the German Official Account. For in its preparation everything has been consulted that has become public up to the time of its appearance, and what we have since learned of the war from French sources has on the whole confirmed the statements of the official German record, and has, at the most, given only a few more details.

Napoleon's political aims, which influenced his strategical measures, will probably never be accurately known. For he was not the man to betray his projects and ambitions to others. From events, however, and from the pamphlet "*les causes qui ont amenées, etc.*," mentioned in the Official Account and attributed to the Emperor himself, sufficiently accurate inferences can be drawn as to the political motives guiding him before and during the war.

In my former letter I stated my opinion that we were the attacked. The Emperor himself has not denied it. At the capitulation of Sedan, however, he stated to the victor that he had not wanted the war, and had been driven into it by "*opinion publique.*" I consider this statement an empty excuse put forth by him during the embarrassment of a painful situation.

You certainly still remember how public opinion in France depended upon the Emperor, how he shaped it himself: for the law gave him unlimited influence over the

press. It can therefore only be assumed that the excitement caused in France by the selection of the Prince of Hohenzollern as King of Spain, was stirred up and nursed by him. For this candidate had been selected at Madrid for the very reason that he was a relative both of the King of Prussia *and* the Emperor of France, and it is well known that he was more closely related to the latter than to the former. Hence, if it had suited Napoleon not to have had any excitement over the choice of the Spaniards, it would have been easy for him to have the matter presented by all the papers inspired by him in the light of a fact desirable on account of the candidate's relationship to the Emperor of France. But Napoleon wanted a pretext for the war upon which he had decided long before. Every one knew that Grammont, before inflaming the hearts of the French by his speech, had asked the Secretary of War if he was ready, and had received an "archiprêt" as answer. Had the latter answered differently, public opinion would have been guided into other channels.

Who has not heard of that triumphant expression of contentment, "C'est ma guerre à moi, ma jolie petite guerre!"

This and the reorganization of the French army by Marshal Niel—after the Luxemburg question in 1867 had failed to bring on the war, because the army was not ready, and when Austria in 1867 could not be induced to give the necessary assistance, as mentioned in my last letter—proves sufficiently that the war which broke out in 1870 had been premeditated for several years, and was to be forced on as soon as the Emperor thought the moment opportune. Nor would he have been at a loss for a pretext even without the selection of the Spanish king.

Being convinced that he contemplated war against Prussia ever since 1867, I ask myself, "What did he mean to gain by it?"

During the entire duration of his power it had become manifest that the chimæra of universal dominion which had



animated the first Napoleon did not enter his more sober mind. His objects were more immediate. He cared more for securing the throne of France permanently for himself and his son. To this end he needed in the eyes of the French (he thought) permanent political lustre—prestige—and from time to time some warlike glory, and, with it, something like the position of arbitrator over the powers governing the globe. For this reason he did not, like the first Napoleon, push his success to the complete destruction of his opponent, but contented himself with partial results, after which he spared the vanquished in order to make him his ally. He meant to play them in the future one against the other. Or he would assist the endeavours of some power (Italy) and make it dependent upon him. The former policy he tried with Russia as early as 1857 in Stuttgart, after defeating her in the Crimea, and in 1867 with Austria, his opponent of 1859. When his attempt at doing with Prussia what he had done with Sardinia failed at Baden in 1860, he determined she should feel his power in 1870, as Russia and Austria had felt it in 1855 and 1859, and then perhaps she would become his ally.

Possibly you may smile at my statement that he did not mean to destroy Prussia. I can tell you, however, that in 1870 Grammont, on shaking hands with one of our diplomatic body, when our Embassy left Paris, spoke these words: "*Adieu, mon cher. J'espère qu'après quelques galantes batailles nos souverains se tendront la main, comme nous nous la tendons aujourd'hui.*"

We looked at it in quite another way, and entered the struggle with the feeling that we were fighting for the existence of the Fatherland. And whoever saw the landwehrman depart from his domestic hearth with weeping wife and children hanging on to his neck, to him these words of Grammont must appear diabolica blasphemy against all that is dear and sacred to man.

Strategy, it is true, does not directly concern itself with all this. For it is the business of strategy to know only the aim of politics.

In order to understand the political aims pursued by Napoleon in the war of 1870, we must refer to his policy of the year before. After wielding for nearly 20 years dictatorial powers disguised beneath a thin constitutional mask in the shape of the completely submissive representation of the people, he had in 1869 appointed a more liberal ministry, and relaxed somewhat the tight reins of power, allowing more liberty in the elections and to the press. He considered it necessary to secure the consent of the nation through a plebiscite. A diplomatist familiar with his ideas told me in those days that he meant to show in his more advanced years that the power he had been wielding was necessary, beneficial, and supported by the confidence of the people. In this way he meant to obliterate the great shedding of blood which had characterized the beginning of his reign, and to secure his dynasty and his son's succession by the apparent harmony between government and people. The plebiscite gave him a great majority, but still there was a considerable opposition. This frightened him. He attributed the existence of this opposition to the fact that since 1859 he had added no prestige to the French name. The only foreign enterprise he had engaged in since the Italian war, the expedition to Mexico, had been so disastrous, that he could not even succeed in covering his failure by a bombastic blazoning forth of the heroic deeds of the soldiers.

He considered it necessary, therefore, to direct the attention of his subjects to foreign affairs and flatter their vanity by gaining glory in war. The solution of "the question of the Rhine frontier" seemed to him the best means to this end. The empress said in those days to the wife of another monarch: "*Il nous faut résoudre la question Rhénane à cause de notre petit.*" Nor was Napoleon mistaken as to the state of mind of Frenchmen. After the battle of Sedan I spent a night in the house of a Frenchman, more than 80 years old, a well-to-do brewer, a genuine type of the honest citizen. When he saw that we committed neither pillage nor murder, he became talkative

on the subject of politics. Curious to ascertain the sentiment and the opinions of this man of peace, I asked him whether this war was popular. "Savez-vous," he said, "nous avons eu la guerre en Crimée, nous avons eu la guerre en Italie, nous avons eu la guerre au Mexique. Ça coûtait de l'argent, il est vrai, mais ça ce lisait très-bien dans les journaux, et ç'apportait de la gloire. Donc cette guerre aussi était populaire. Mais ce que nous n'avons pas voulu, c'est la guerre chez nous. Nous l'avons voulue chez vous."

Pretending ignorance, I asked: "Eh ça n'a pas réussi, à ce qu'il me semble." "Il paraît que non," said the old gentleman, quietly, and leaned back comfortably in his easy-chair.

I was also told that the emperor's desire for the rectification of the Rhine frontier was heightened by some little private interest. Paris needed annually more and more coal to supply the enormous demand for gas. Had Napoleon obtained possession of the coal mines in the Saar district, he would have received a considerable addition to his private income from the profits gained by supplying the capital from these mines. As it was, his personal expenses far exceeded his income. I read once, I believe in one of Sarcey's writings, that in anticipation of obtaining possession of them, he had already made contracts with the gas companies of Paris.

From all these considerations the following seems to me to have been his political object.

He meant to gain some military successes by effecting a surprise with his well-appointed army; counting on the sympathy of Southern Germany and her breach with Prussia, hoping for warlike threats from Austria and Italy. He meant, after scaring Prussia in this way, to content himself in a sudden fit of moderation with the Rhine frontier, thus earning Prussia's gratitude and friendship by his moderation, in order to be able to play her off against Austria on some other occasion.

A total defeat or destruction of Prussia might have strengthened Austria too much, which would be contrary to his interests. Had he intended to destroy Prussia, he would not have brought about the dissolution of the Hanoverian Legion in the autumn of 1869, since it might have rendered him welcome assistance.

It was no contradiction to these aims that he made the daily press in July, 1870, proclaim "à Berlin." In 1859 he had cried "Italy free to the Adriatic," and yet had brought his victorious army to a halt on the Mincio.

Grammont's words at the departure of the Prussian diplomatist, which I mentioned above, are in accord with this policy.

But Napoleon had only considered the organization of his own army, which was, in a way, a professional army composed of hired mercenaries. He had not taken into account the universal liability to serve which obtains in Germany, which puts into the field the flower of the nation, and includes fathers of families, who are called into battle only in a war for existence, not for the purpose of "quelques galantes batailles." This general liability to service gave to the German army its superiority in numbers and in *moral*.

His plan of operation, as stated in the German Official Account, agrees with these political aims, as I have taken them to be. He considered the superiority of numbers on the part of the German army, and estimated it at 500,000, the French at 300,000 men. By the invasion of Southern Germany, he hoped to increase his army to 450,000 by the accession of the South German troops, and to reduce the Prussian or North German army to 350,000.

This plan, the Official Account says, was in so far correct that the numerical superiority of Germany could be balanced only by celerity of action.

But that which proved faulty in it and was so detrimental to the French arms, is throughout so in-

structive that we cannot refrain from discussing it critically.

In the first place, it strikes us that he aimed at very remote objects and neglected more immediate points. He meant to effect a surprise and defeat the enemy in detail with his united forces; but he also imposed on the French army a long march to Southern Germany in order to enforce her neutrality before seeking the Prussian army and defeating it. The distance from Maxau, where he meant to cross the Rhine, to Munich is 166 miles as the crow flies, and could not be covered by an army of 300,000 men in less than two weeks, even if not impeded by the enemy. Do you think the Prussian army would have looked on inactive for two weeks to see Napoleon enforce the neutrality of the South German states? If a defection of Southern Germany from Prussia could in any way have occurred, it could only be after the French army had succeeded in surprising and defeating the Prussian.

Hence we see that the French plan of operation violated two of the main principles of strategy. In the first place, it should have taken into consideration the strategical deployment of the army and adapted all further steps to the situation, condition, and position of the enemy as existing at the time when the deployment was completed. Then, in the second place, it should have striven to meet the hostile forces, and only afterwards aimed at occupying territory, not the reverse.

Furthermore, the plan of operation designates as centres of the strategical deployment, Strassburg for 100,000, Metz for 150,000, and Châlons for 50,000 men. No reason can be assigned why the second named force should be assembled almost 95 miles from the first, all the more as it was intended after completing the deployment to march the troops from Metz to Strassburg, which would consume another week. Still more incomprehensible is it that 50,000 men should be assembled at Châlons, 95 miles in rear of Metz. For even had it been the intention to use

them later on to cover the left flank of the army advancing over the Rhine (i.e. against the Prussian army assembling in the Palatinate), they might have been left behind at the proper time, though assembled at first with the main army. It would seem to me that a strategical deployment of the entire 300,000 men in Northern Alsace, perhaps on the line Hagenau-Strassburg, would have been a gain of time for the troops at Metz of one week, and for those at Châlons of two weeks, provided the enemy's measures still allowed the offensive. But such as his plan of operation was, Napoleon could count on it only if the French railroads system allowed of a more rapid concentration on the frontier than the German. I shall prove to you presently that the contrary was the case.

But first let us finish with "Maxau."

To cross the Rhine at Maxau was one of those geographical propositions which should be avoided in any plan of operation as long as it is uncertain if the enemy will disturb it. Maxau, perhaps, was designated by the Emperor in the belief that for the purpose of attaining his political aims he would be able to make a military promenade through Carlsruhe and Stuttgart to Munich, for the shortest road from Paris and Metz leads over the Rhine at Maxau to Carlsruhe. In that case he indulged in illusions which seem incomprehensible, and which can only be explained to a certain extent by giving credence to the rumour, then in circulation, that one of his diplomats reported to the Emperor that Baden, Wurtemberg, and Bavaria were only waiting for the appearance of the French army to join him. If this be so, Napoleon was grossly misinformed as to the internal condition of the country against which he made war.

The same lack of information is apparent also in other phases of the plan. Marshal Niel's plan of reorganization of the French army assumes that, upon calling in the reserves by telegraph, the troops could be assembled ready to march at their places of assembly on the 12th day.

This telegraphic order was issued on July 15th, and the troops should have been ready to start on July 28th. To these twelve days we must add the time necessary to transport the troops from their points of equipment to the zone of strategical deployment, and though it may have been intended to begin this while the troops were yet on a peace footing, still a delay of several days had then to be allowed for, as the prearranged tables for the movements of the reserves must in that case be seriously interfered with. But irrespective of this delay and under the supposition that the strategical deployment could have been completed on 28th July, the plan of operation still required the troops at Metz to join those at Strassburg, and thus a week at least must have elapsed before crossing the Rhine at Maxau could be thought of. Even if a mere military promenade *viâ* Carlsruhe and Stuttgart to Munich had sufficed to bring about the defection of the South German states, the ordinary unimpeded march would have required two weeks. Thus three weeks must still elapse after the 28th July before the French army could think of "seeking the Prussian army and defeating it." Was it reasonable to indulge in the illusion that the latter would not be ready for active operations on the 18th August? That this was assumed is the more surprising as in those days there was with the French embassy at Berlin a French officer who knew the Prussian army more thoroughly than perhaps any other foreign officer ever did. In his duties, Colonel Stoffel was assisted by a complete mastery of the German language, by his amiable and friendly demeanour and clever intellect, as well as by his untiring energy. He was intimately acquainted with our organization and state of preparation. This enigma was not solved until after the war, when his most important, accurate, and detailed reports, every line of which cautioned his countrymen against war, were found unopened. They had not been read!

Lastly, it was hoped to detain a considerable part of

the Prussian army by the mere appearance of the French fleet in the North Sea and the Baltic. The events proved that this supposition was erroneous and that the appearance of the German army on French soil chained the guns of the French navy to Paris. This illusion will be less surprising if you consider—a point we discussed on a former occasion—that in 1859 the Emperor had succeeded in detaining a considerable part of the Austrian army by the mere rumour of a naval descent on the coast of the Adriatic.

Hence the French plan of operation was, in everything concerning the enemy's forces, based upon no solid foundation, and was bound to dissolve into thin air as soon as confronted by actual facts.

This will not surprise you if you consider that the highest military authorities in Paris were totally ignorant of the condition of their own army. The Official Account gives a good description of this state of things on pages 14 to 33, which has been confirmed by all French information that have since become available. You will find that the army did not reach the anticipated strength within the period fixed and that the gaps made by the Mexican adventure had not been filled either in point of the numbers of officers and troops, or as to instruction, armament, and equipment. The War Minister's "archiprêt" proved an expression of the most unjustifiable folly. As to details, a great loss of time was caused by the fact that the reserve men on furlough had to join their dépôts and then to be transported thence to their regiments. A large part of the latter had their dépôts at places other than their garrisons. Thus it came about that men who happened to live where their regiments stood had to go to the dépôt and back again, as, for instance, from Dunkerque to Lyons and back. In the meantime the regiment had left the garrison *en route* for the place assigned to it in the strategical deployment, and the trains carrying the reserves wandered about helplessly looking for their regiments. To this must



be added the centralization of all, even the smallest details, in the office of the minister of war.

In the narratives that have been published you may read how various organizations, divisions, even regiments, telegraphed to the Secretary of War for supplies which they lacked. One was short of coffee, the other of shelter tents, this one of knapsacks, the other of horses. In the first two or three weeks after declaring war therefore, such a mass of work accumulated in the War Office at Paris, that it could not be dealt with. For there was no organization like that of the Prussian army, according to which each army corps carries out its mobilization independently and is supplied with everything it requires in peace time, and must be ready for any eventuality.

Furthermore it is absolutely impossible to suppose that before the war of 1870 all the railway tables for mobilisation and strategical deployment had been pre-arranged in France down to the day and hour, as had been done by the German general staff. Otherwise the great confusion in the transport during mobilisation would have been avoided, nor could the government have given itself up to illusions regarding the period within which the mobilisation could be completed. It seems that the War Office at Paris accepted a general statement of the capacity of the railroads as stated by the latter themselves, without controlling them and ascertaining whether the requisite transport material was on hand. Nor does the latter seem to have been the case. Yet there was sufficient cause and time for considering and preparing everything, as it had been decided ever since the beginning of 1868 to undertake this war at the first favourable opportunity.

Speaking of the transport by rail during the strategical deployment, I propose to compare the capacity of the French railways with the German.

In France, ever since railroads were introduced, any concession for building new lines had been made dependent upon the manner in which they would serve the defence of

the country. In every case the approval of the War Office had first to be obtained. In Germany the railways were laid down as it suited each state, which, almost without exception, considered solely the commercial requirements in time of peace. It might be expected from this that of the railroad systems thus created the French would prove the more useful in mobilisation.

The very opposite was the case. For the French War Office was based upon the principle of centralizing the whole country in the capital. From Paris all the railroads radiated toward the frontier, whither they might forward troops ex-centrally, but could not concentrate them. While thus in 1870 France had but three or four lines leading to the theatre of war (of which the most important, Paris-Metz, did not extend beyond Verdun), Germany, with her many roads running towards the frontier and crosswise, had nine lines available. If we look at the net of French railroads in 1870, it looks as though constructed rather with a view to the concentration of troops from the frontier around Paris, than the reverse. The main difference in the two countries was that in France, Paris was considered the base of operations, in Germany the whole country.

Of all the mistakes made, the most surprising is probably that the troops were hurried to the theatre of war in an incomplete condition, unprepared for war, and were to complete their mobilisation there. For the experience of 1859 had demonstrated what disadvantages this had entailed on the Austrians, and what advantages the contrary had brought to the French.

But the Emperor thought it necessary to set the regiments marching in order to defer to the "en avant" which the "opinion publique," so dear to him, shrieked in the streets. He had shaped that "opinion publique"; it was he who had inflamed and unchained the ungovernable spirits; he could no longer listen to the voice of sound reason and cool deliberation, but must hearken solely to

the expression of universal excitement in which those who cast the decisive vote knew nothing whatever of military affairs.

Thus it must ever be when a government has not sufficient power to place the dictates of sound reason above the clamour of deluded crowds.

Blume very properly says: "The demands (i.e. of strategy) can only be fulfilled where the supreme direction of all military and political affairs of the state rests in one hand;" and later on: "it is for this reason that mature republics have without hesitation resorted to dictatorship during great wars."

Napoleon had held this dictatorship in his hands. But for the purpose of securing the throne to his dynasty he had since the latter part of 1869 relinquished part of it in favour of an idea, intangible and impersonal, of a vacillating character, in favour of his "sixth Great Power," public opinion, and thereby lost the crown for himself and his dynasty.

He had founded his throne by means of intrigue and the concealed and obscure revolutionary forces of public opinion, and thought it necessary, in his advanced age, to rely again upon them. Once more the revolutionary origin of his power influenced his politics and through it his strategy, as it had done in 1859. The fates were with him then because the enemy allowed himself to be imposed upon. In 1870, however, a cool, reasoning opponent, reckoning only with real forces, tore the veil from his phantoms, and shattered his throne.

It remains now to consider how the plan of operation was carried out and what modifications were made when "his will was met by the independent will of the opponent," as the German Official Account expresses it.

Napoleon had counted upon not exceeding the twelve days required in Marshal Niel's plan of organization to get the troops ready for active operations, and must have indulged in the hope that the concentration of the troops,

while on a peace footing, would not delay the mobilisation. For on the 28th July, the thirteenth day after the order calling in the reserves and men on furlough, he arrived at Metz. He apparently reckoned upon being able to begin offensive movements the next day. Otherwise, why did he leave the capital? There his presence was more important than with the army, as long as the latter was still busy allocating reservists as they arrived, and with the concentration of troops.

In the meantime Bazaine, who represented the Emperor in the command of the army, reported by telegraph on 20th July: "The Prussians seem to be awaiting a battle in the vicinity of Maintz; they are concentrating their troops between that place and Coblenz."

Even at this stage the plan of invading Southern Germany became uncertain. "The mighty magnet of an army between Coblenz and Maintz attracted the French army irresistibly."

On the 23rd July the War Minister at Paris countermanded the order and directed five of the eight French corps to be assembled in the triangle Bouzonville-Saargemünd-Metz. The necessary movements began on the 24th July. The mere rumour of the impending concentration of a Prussian army between Coblenz and Maintz (it could not have been more than a rumour, for no movements of troops took place in Germany on the fifth day of mobilisation) made it plain to the commander of the French army, that in case of an invasion of Southern Germany the reserve army of 50,000 men would not be sufficient to cover the left flank of the main army against the whole of the Prussian forces as early as the 24th July, therefore the plan of an invasion of Southern Germany began to shrivel into the pleasant recollection of a too ambitious scheme.

Perhaps the leaders of the French army flattered themselves with the hope that the mere appearance of MacMahon's insignificant forces would suffice to make

Southern Germany Napoleon's ally. This delusion, however, cannot have lasted long.

MacMahon was given command over all the forces to be raised in Alsace, i.e. his (1st) and Douay's (7th) corps. But, as stated before, he did not organize a regular superior army command and was to retain the command of his own corps in addition to that of the army. The Emperor reserved for himself the command over all the corps and meant to give them his orders directly. According to the Order of Battle the Rhine army consisted of eight army corps, a Cavalry Reserve of three separate divisions without a commander of the whole, a general Artillery Reserve, and a small Engineer Reserve, twelve subordinate commands. I have already discussed with you the necessity of organizing such masses into *armies*.

The forces of MacMahon, it would seem, appeared sufficient to the War Minister, who had arrived at Metz before the Emperor on the 27th July. For what purpose, it does not appear. The tenour of the telegram in which Le Boeuf communicates this to the Emperor, gives a glimpse of the internal condition of the army. For he says: "The four divisions of MacMahon must be pretty well formed by this time at Strassburg and Hagenau." According to our notions the Emperor would require from his Minister of War the most precise daily information as to the exact state of preparation of each corps.

When the Emperor arrived at Metz on the 28th he thought he would be able to begin the offensive at once, as his proclamation to the army announced. On the 29th July he ordered Marshal Bazaine to cross the Saar between Saarbrücken and Saargemünd on the 31st with the 2nd, 3rd and 5th Corps, while the 4th Corps was to make a demonstration against Saarlouis. But all four commanding generals declared it impossible, because the troops were still without certain articles of provision and equipment, i.e. because the mobilisation was not complete and the army was not yet capable of active operations.

To this bitter disappointment was added another. The 6th and 7th Corps and two of the three divisions of the Cavalry Reserve as well as the Artillery Reserve were not as yet available. The telegram of the Minister of War of the 27th July to the commanding general of the 7th Corps is the counterpart of his telegram to the Emperor, referred to above. It reads: "How far are you with your formation? Where are your divisions? etc."

In his pamphlet the Emperor states that at this time he had only 100,000 men on the Saar, and MacMahon 40,000 in Alsace; he probably counts the infantry only. Official reports place the strength of the army (including the 6th and 7th Corps and Cavalry Reserve) at 210,080 men on 29th July, of which 34,500 were at Châlons.

Already at this early date the Commander of the French army became aware of its inability to take the offensive. The tables were turned. It became necessary to relinquish the advantages of the initiative to the enemy and accept his dictation. All the more objectionable was the state of ignorance of the hostile movements. It was learnt that Steinmetz was about to concentrate two corps behind the Saar, and that two corps of Prince Frederick Charles' army were on the march from Mainz to Kaiserslautern. Still the Emperor could not bring himself to give up the idea of the offensive. Feeling that something had to be done, and not knowing exactly what to do, he resolved upon the usual "reconnaissance in force." Bazaine was given orders to that effect, and also the command over the 2nd, 3rd and 5th Corps. By occupying the heights opposite Saarbrücken he was to compel the enemy to show his hand. Orders as to minor details give an idea of the unready condition of the army. The teams of the bridge-train of the 3rd Corps, for instance, were to come from the reserve horses of the artillery of the 3rd Corps, or if these were too far off, from those of the 2nd Corps, or from "any teams that could be laid hands on."

This reconnaissance took place on August 2nd. Bazaine

directed the 2nd Corps on Saarbrücken, one division of the 3rd Corps on Wehrden, one division of the 5th Corps on Saargemünd.

The French masses forced back the isolated German companies guarding the frontier, reached the heights opposite Saarbrücken, ignited a few buildings by artillery fire and halted on the Saar, entrenching themselves on the left bank of that river. Of the enemy they saw four battalions, four guns and a few squadrons of cavalry. The strategic result of the reconnaissance was *nil*. Enough was accomplished, however, to send bombastic battle telegrams to Paris, to pacify public opinion for the moment.

During the next two days the steps taken by the Commander of the French army indicate the state of feeling which must necessarily result from the conviction—growing more and more irresistible—of being forced to adopt the defensive, instead of the offensive. On the 3rd August the army, broadly speaking, remained where it was; but the Emperor, hearing of movements of troops on the Upper Rhine in Baden, directed that Douay should not join MacMahon, but should remain in Upper Alsace. On the 4th August a concentration on the left flank was begun, because the Commissioner of Police at Diedenhofen reported that 40,000 Prussians were assembling at Trier!

“Already it was necessary to dance to the tune the enemy piped,” and played by an enemy of whom nothing definite was known. It will no doubt appear peculiar to you that the movements of a whole army are made upon the report of a commissioner of police in a town for the protection of which this same army had advanced 9½ miles beyond it. It might rather be expected that the army should have furnished information of the enemy to Diedenhofen. If not, what was it there for?

According to our present ideas, while the army was completing its formation the cavalry divisions should have been brought to the front to gather definite information of

the enemy by means of diligent patrols pushed well forward, instead of from indefinite rumours. Such strategical employment of masses of cavalry was not then so universally regarded as profitable by the military world, as now, after the German army has set the example.<sup>1</sup> Bodies of infantry were pushed to the frontier as advanced guards, too far for timely support by the army, too near not to spread alarm when attacked. Thus MacMahon sent a division to Weissenburg and Frossard halted with the 2nd Corps in front of Saarbrücken, to observe the enemy. Both failed to see, while both were placed in a very dangerous position, as events afterwards proved.

In rear of these advanced troops the remaining corps were being worn out by marching to and fro, as contradictory rumours regarding the enemy reached headquarters and produced different conceptions of the strategical situation. On the 4th August it was decided to order Faily's corps to take position at Bitsch, so as to be in connection with MacMahon, leaving only one division at Saargemünd.

Here again we behold the same spectacle that the Austrian army presented to us in 1859. Intending to advance on the offensive with united forces it soon found itself compelled to spread over a front of nearly 190 miles because it wished to cover everything. Hence it could not be superior at any one point and therefore covered nothing. Douay's corps is ordered to Upper, MacMahon's corps to Lower Alsace, Faily's corps to Bitsch, while Frossard remains at Spicheren, the 4th Corps at Boulay and Teterchen, behind these the Guards, after several counter-orders, and near them the 3rd Corps. The orders for these arrangements were given on the 4th August, seven days after the 28th July, the day on which, according to Niel's plan of mobilisation and according to Napoleon's plan of operation, the united armies of Metz and Strassburg should have crossed the Rhine at Maxau!

<sup>1</sup> The German army merely revived the Napoleonic practice —ED.



I refrain from giving in detail the miserable consequences of the frequent change in the conception of the strategical situation, which caused fatiguing, useless marches, for I discussed this point in detail when we were corresponding on the war of 1859. I wish to observe, however, that the French headquarters in 1870, as well as the Austrian in May, 1859, were in the dark as to the strategical meaning of the words "cover" and "connection." Placing troops in front of some points does not always cover them, especially when a large extent of front is to be guarded, because in that case sufficient troops cannot be posted at every point. There are strategical situations in which the frontier to be protected is better covered by taking up, with considerable united forces (or which are capable of being united on the same day for a common purpose), a menacing position which, though leaving the frontier itself open, places the enemy in a dangerous position as soon as he crosses it. The difference becomes plain if you compare the steps taken on both sides for covering the Rhine frontier between Alsace and Baden. The French post one corps in Upper, another in Lower Alsace. The 3rd German Army, leaving the frontier in question entirely uncovered (the few troops scouting in Baden on the Upper Rhine served only to comfort the inhabitants and disconcert the enemy, and were of no significance as a fighting force), was ready behind the Lauter to take the enemy in flank, if he should risk an advance over the Rhine.

No less obscure is the conception of "connection" on the part of the leaders of the French army. What was Faillly to effect at Bitsch, 19 miles from Saargemünd and Wörth, 24 miles from Weissenburg? A squadron of cavalry stationed there would have been sufficient to furnish relays for the transmission of orders, should the telegraph fail, and might also have reconnoitred any enemy assembled, for instance, at Pirmasens. It could not well have been thought possible at French headquarters that a German corps would steal from Pirmasens

through the mountains by way of Bitsch to Nancy, when a French army stood on the Saar from Saarbrücken to Saargemünd, and another in Lower Alsace. All this again proves the truth of the old rule so often stated by me, that for the purpose of protection and connection as few troops as possible should be withheld from the decisive battle-field.

In considering the steps taken by the command of the French army from 2nd to 5th August, another thought occurs to me, which prompts me to give you in a few words my ideas as to the strategical value of a fortress. It was proposed at one time to take up a defensive position at Calenbronn, which had formerly been selected by Marshal Niel, in case the available forces should not be sufficient for the offensive. By means of this defensive position it was proposed to cover Metz and Diedenhofen as Strassburg was meant to be covered by MacMahon's position at Wörth.

Fortresses are valuable on the theatre of war if they cover the country in rear and front and on their sides to a certain distance. If they themselves need cover, they are an evil. In that case they are a terrible drag on the freedom of action of the army. They compel the strategist to pay as much attention to them as to the enemy. They chain him to geographical points at the very beginning of the operations, after the strategical deployment, and even during the latter, at a time when rational strategy should pay no attention to geography, making the enemy's forces the sole object of its operations. They must not be entirely neglected or exposed to the danger of capture by the enemy, for the latter might ensconce himself in them and put them in a good state of defence for his own purposes. A fortress not in a proper state of defence, therefore, is an evil on the theatre of war, as long as it remains in that condition, and it were better if it did not exist at all.

Up to 1870 the fortresses in France were divided into classes as they were with us, not according to their size,

however, but according to the state of defence in which they were to be maintained in time of peace in view of their geographical location. Frontier fortresses like Metz, Strassburg, and Diedenhofen were of the first class and to be permanently maintained in a state of defence. Now if Coffinières declared on the 14th August, more than four weeks after the order of mobilisation, that Metz was not as yet in a state of defence, and if Strassburg, which was invested after the 10th August, was still in as unprepared a state as appears from all available sources, you have one more illustration of the value of Le Boeuf's "archiprêt" at the beginning of July.

Had the fortresses of Metz, Strassburg, and Diedenhofen been in a thorough state of defence, the French army should, in my opinion, have begun its retreat as soon as it realized that it was thrown on the defensive, and that would have been on the 1st or 2nd August. Leaving on the frontier only the available bodies of cavalry for observing the enemy and screening the movements of their own army, all the corps should have been withdrawn beyond the line of the Meurthe and Mosel. Here, in the country behind the line Nancy-Metz-Diedenhofen, protected by the fortresses of Metz and Diedenhofen, it could have gained time to complete its organization, and then have taken the offensive against the invader, wherever found. If victorious, it would at the same time have protected Strassburg, which could certainly have held out a few weeks. The probability of victory was greater if the army were properly organized and concentrated under cover of the fortresses, than if compelled to protect them and scatter in front of them while not fully prepared for active operations.

On the evening of the 4th August the French headquarters received the news of the engagement at Weissenburg, in which the division pushed forward to the frontier by MacMahon was surprised by enormously superior numbers and crushed. I should think this information produced about the same effect as a bursting

dynamite bomb in a social gathering. After indulging in the hope of crushing with 70,000 men an enemy 40,000 strong in the vicinity of Saarbrücken, it must have been suddenly realized that the defensive was the only thing left. Yet the proper conclusions were not drawn from this event, which should have led to an immediate retreat behind the Mosel. Half-measures were adopted. Faily was ordered to concentrate his corps at Bitsch, and on the 5th two armies were formed, one under MacMahon (1st, 5th and 7th Corps), one under Bazaine (2nd, 3rd and 4th Corps), while the Emperor reserved for himself the 6th Corps, Guards and Army Reserves.

But this division into armies was only half carried out. MacMahon and Bazaine retained command of their own corps, the other corps being only placed under their command in so far "as concerns military operations." Mischievous misunderstandings due to these half-measures soon occurred. For only to them can be attributed the fact that Faily went to MacMahon's assistance in the battle of Wörth with but a portion of his corps, and that came too late, while the greater portion did not come up at all. This is confirmed by the charges afterward brought against one another by the two commanders.

MacMahon did not lose a minute in assembling his scattered troops. Those of the 7th Corps which, in obedience to the orders of the previous day, were on the march to Upper Alsace, had their order countermanded and were directed to the position of Wörth, in part by rail. Faily was also directed to proceed there. If MacMahon was to remain in Alsace to cover Strassburg, nothing can be said against the position of Wörth. The enemy could not pass it by and threaten Strassburg without being himself taken in flank. The selection of the position indicates the defensive with decided offensive intentions. It is not MacMahon's fault that it was too late to concentrate the army. The collision took place on the 6th August. What forces MacMahon had been

able to assemble were crushed by superior numbers, disorganized and in full flight when on the evening of the battle one of Faily's divisions arrived and found itself unable to do anything beyond staying the pursuit for the night.

Bazaine did not, like MacMahon, assemble the troops under his command in one body, otherwise he must have concentrated them behind the Mosel or in the position of Calenbronn. Frossard felt himself seriously endangered and retired as far as the heights of Spicheren, which were deemed impregnable. In the conflict of the 6th August he was not supported by Bazaine, although some divisions of the 3rd Corps could have easily arrived in time for the battle, had they been ordered up promptly.

There has been much contention as to whose fault it was. The various reports and orders in this connection have convinced me that Bazaine did not quite consider Frossard's corps as part of his own command, but merely as a neighbouring corps which he hesitated to support with his own troops as long as it was uncertain whether he might not himself be in danger, and that, therefore, the failure to support Frossard on the 6th August was also a consequence of the ill-defined position of Bazaine as army commander.

Both the battles of the 6th August were chance encounters, which neither side had intended for that day. They were unexpected, and arose from the proximity of the two forces, and the victory was bound to fall to the one who was more uniformly organized and more concentrated, i.e. so posted that in case of necessity he could bring superior forces on the spot in a shorter time. For this reason these actions are highly instructive for the strategical deployment as well as for strategical operations generally.

This day marks, in a way, the period of transition from deployment to active operations.

We learn from what I have said that while strategy may, in a general way, select its objectives, yet it must never

anticipate the future in detail ; it must never indulge in the "music of the future," as a recent critic ironically and strikingly puts it.

The leader of an army should, therefore, especially for the purpose of strategical deployment, always so direct the component corps as to ensure their co-operation in any case on the same day. This is to be accomplished, not by means of special instructions for every possible contingency (with regard to which it is usually the unforeseen which happens), but by keeping the corps so near together that they can mutually support each other, and by a method of command which leaves to the subordinate leaders the freedom of independent action.

The Official Account mentions a very striking and instructive case. It was the intention of the Supreme Command of the German army on the 5th August to complete the concentration of the First and Second Armies on the line Neunkirchen-Zweibrücken on the 7th, to let the army rest on the 8th and begin offensive operations on the 9th. But even for so short a period as four days in advance the Supreme Command avoided influencing the action of the army commanders by giving instructions and advices as to its future intentions. It was recognized that in view of the enemy's proximity an offensive on his part against the Second Army, before the latter's strategical deployment was completed, might render assistance from the First Army in the shape of a flank attack necessary, and it was therefore considered advisable not to tie the hands of the army commanders by prematurely communicating the plans ; the Official Account owns that it was not the intention of the Commander-in-Chief to cross the Saar before the 9th August. But it was not considered advisable to communicate even this negative intention, and despite the requests from the commander of the First Army, no instructions were given out for the next few days. So long as the critical uncertainty existed, it was considered permissible and sound to regulate the

movements of the corps daily from the Royal Headquarters, the telegraph insuring prompt arrival of the orders. Though the independence of the army commanders was thereby limited as concerns the offensive, the very lack of instructions gave them liberty and imposed on them the duty of acting on their own responsibility, in case unforeseen events should require such prompt action that orders from the Supreme Commander could not be waited for.

Thus the battle of Spicheren arose from a conflict of the advanced troops of the First Army with those of Frossard's corps. Had Steinmetz been given specific directions not to cross the Saar before the 9th August, the 14th Division would never have taken it into its head to cling to the Exerzierplatz of Saarbrücken and would have retired behind the town. In that case the 6th August would perchance have witnessed a check of the 14th Division (not a matter of much consequence) instead of a victory.

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If we recapitulate and compare the plans of operation of the opposing armies, we find :—

1. The German command contemplated in the first place the strategical deployment of the army ; the French had in mind from the beginning far-reaching projects, reckoning with unknown quantities and abstruse calculations.

2. After completing the strategical deployment, the German commanders took for their next objective the hostile army only, whenever and wherever found ; the French had in mind geographical conceptions, occupation of localities and countries, while the hostile army was a secondary consideration.

3. The German strategical deployment was based on the most accurate calculation. The German leader, without absolutely correct information about the enemy,

estimated him generally, overrating him as regards numbers and readiness for war, so as to preclude at any rate unpleasant surprises.

The French had hardly any authentic information of the enemy; under-estimated his strength and state of readiness; were at the same time poorly informed even of the condition of their own forces, and made a mistake of weeks in the time required to get ready for war.

4. For these reasons the French leaders began to feel, five days after their mobilization commenced, one day after the declaration of war, that the initiative was slipping from their grasp and was transferred to the enemy, who now began to impose his will on them. Twelve days later, they were completely thrown on the defensive, which it was decided to carry out by occupying the whole of the extensive frontier.

The German commander endeavoured so to carry out the defensive, upon which in the commencement he saw himself thrown by the political situation, as to assemble all the forces at one point (regardless of the fact that parts of the frontier were thus left unprotected) in order to take the offensive against the enemy immediately after concentration.



## SEVENTEENTH LETTER.

### OF STRATEGICAL DEPLOYMENT IN GENERAL.

· You are right in concluding from my previous remarks that the strategical deployment is the starting point of all strategy ; I might go farther and call it the crown, the principal part. This is in accord with the sentence of the Official Account which I mentioned once before : “ Mistakes made in the original concentration of the army can hardly be rectified during the entire campaign.” This we saw in the year of 1806. Napoleon I. really decided the war on the 8th October. The same thing we found in 1859 ; as soon as Napoleon III. had completed the strategical deployment of his army, he had the probability of victory on his side ; he gained it despite all subsequent mistakes. A still more striking proof is shown in 1870.

If you ask me in this connection to epitomize the rules for strategical deployment, you give me a task which is beyond my powers, which is not in keeping with the manner in which I like to treat military matters, and is, therefore, against my ideas thereon. For I dislike all such general theories, recipes for strategy and tactics, which require modifications in every special case, because never applicable in their entirety.

I prefer to deal with actual facts, and to investigate them, so that the impressions they leave on the brain may be available in the case of fresh events. But since you wish it, I shall endeavour to lay down the principles of strategical deployment as they seem to me. But

I protest in advance against any expectations which you may entertain that I should furnish you with a complete scientific treatise.

The strategical deployment is the assembly of the army to meet the hostile forces at a decisive point with a good prospect of success, and should at the same time cover the base of operations from the enemy.

Its object therefore is twofold, offensive and defensive; circumstances decide which of the two is the more urgent; these deciding circumstances are closely connected with politics and may change from time to time.

Thus in 1859 we saw the Austrian army carry out the strategical deployment in the offensive sense; after the lapse of some time, when the enemy's deployment was complete, it was compelled to change its plans, to cover its base, while the enemy on the contrary at first endeavoured to protect his base and was enabled later to take the offensive, without tying himself strictly to the protection of the latter.

In 1870 the strategical deployment of the German army had in the beginning mainly offensive tendencies, although the war was a defensive one politically; the sudden political initiative on the part of the enemy made the protection of the base, by means of a concentration on the Rhine, the principal consideration for the time being, until the concentration of sufficient force and the enemy's inactivity rendered it practicable to place the line of concentration farther forward, with a view to assuming the offensive.

In his deployment the enemy was solely guided by offensive tendencies; the rapid concentration of the German army forced him to adopt the defensive, which he had not previously contemplated at all. Hence the base was soon in danger. Such a change of parts did not take place in 1806; his superiority enabled Napoleon to be guided in his deployment by offensive considerations only. Still he could not free himself from considerations for his

base, whence his troops started and whence they drew their supplies.

Perhaps you ask what I understand in strategy by "base"; I feel inclined to answer this question with the definition which my teacher in mathematics, the genial Professor S., used to give of points, lines, surfaces, planes and bodies. After discussing all the definitions extant and declaring them insufficient, he would add, that whoever did not know and wanted to have explained what these expressions meant, had better not study mathematics. But we frequently meet in military writings so many different and often obscure definitions of this word "base," that I will state my conception of it.

The base of an army is the country from which it draws its supplies, reserves, etc.; at the beginning of a war, therefore, the whole kingdom is, as a rule, the base. Formerly it was customary to name a line, or one or two fortresses as the base, which is not always correct. When we were engaged in the artillery fight with the fortresses of Paris, it became quite plain to me how the whole of Germany was our base; materials and ammunition for which I made requisition to the Minister of War were forwarded partly from Strassburg, partly from Cologne and Coblenz, partly from Spandau, partly from Koenigsberg.

Of course, there are modifications; in 1806 France and Southern Germany, then under Napoleon's sway, formed the base of the French army. Napoleon ordered the concentration of his forces in front of the South German base, because the greater part of his army was already there.

The bases of the Allies in 1859 consisted of France and Sardinia. While the Austrian army remained in Piedmont, the French army based itself on France only. The communications thence to the theatre of war were limited to two roads, one through Genoa, the other over the Mont Cenis. Hence we might say that the French had two bases; as soon as the movements of the troops over the Mount Cenis ceased, this base was almost entirely relin-

quished and the other used to avoid dispersion of the troops which were used to guard the latter entirely.

The character of the base of operations may also be greatly modified when a naval power wages a transmaritime war, as England did a short time ago against Egypt. The army, after disembarking, considers the point of debarkation as the nearest base. But I might repeat my former statement that in the wider sense the Fatherland alone is the base, and that in the last named case the point of disembarkation, in the war of 1859 the two mountain roads, were mere communications with the base.

Enough now of the definitions of the word. If the zone of deployment is so to be selected that from it the base can be protected and the hostile forces met, it must usually lie between the former and the latter.

The offensive tendency of the deployment renders it desirable to select this place as close as possible to the hostile forces, in order to be able, after completing the assembly of the troops, to utilize quickly the period of superiority over the enemy, i.e. before the latter can deploy an equal or a superior force.

The defensive tendency of the deployment require on the other hand the observance of such a distance from the hostile forces as to give sufficient time to bring up sufficient forces for the offensive before the enemy can reach the army.

Hence, we find the commander of the German army designating the Rhine as the zone of deployment, and pushing the latter forward successfully as reinforcements arrived, to the vicinity of Alzey, afterwards to that of Kaiserslautern, and finally to the Saar.

It is in the interest of a power at war to be able to begin the offensive immediately upon the completion of the deployment—but not before—so as at once to seize the advantages of rapidity and the initiative. Hence it should defer the declaration of war until the deployment is completed, though it may have become convinced some time previously that war be unavoidable.

Among civilized peoples it is a point of international law not to commit any hostile acts or enter the enemy's country before a formal declaration of war.<sup>1</sup> This compels us to begin the deployment within our own frontiers, unless the enemy anticipates us by declaring war. Only powers of a revolutionary character or origin have disregarded this essential condition in the observance of treaties and have entered on foreign soil before a declaration of war and under protestations of friendship. Thus acted the First Napoleon. Such proceedings we must regard as out of the question as far as we are concerned. Hence in our discussion we must consider the form of the frontier as one of the most important elements in strategical deployment.

The defensive tendency of the deployment may lead to a distribution of the entire force in such a manner that, wherever the enemy might take the offensive, he would meet hostile bodies. A great extent of frontier might thus induce such an extensive distribution of the army that it could not at any one spot act with sufficient force. However clear this may be to you and me, yet this mistake is made in almost all wars by one side or the other. Thus in 1806 on the part of the Prussians; in 1859 on the part of the Austrian commander, as soon as he thought himself thrown on the defensive, after posting himself in the Lomellina; in 1870 on the part of France, when after the 2nd August she relinquished the offensive.

No more front should be taken up by the strategic deployment, no more extent of frontier should be directly covered than will allow of the rapid concentration in one or two days, if possible, of sufficient forces against the enemy's main army. The troops should be massed in rear of each other rather than beside each other. We

<sup>1</sup> In opposition to this see "Hostilities without Declaration of War." But the pedantic regard for the sacredness of French soil prevented the Allies in Belgium, in 1815, discovering the French movements. This was probably due to direct orders.—ED.

have seen, however, that when troops are posted in rear of each other, not more than three corps can be brought up for the decisive action for the defensive, not more than two for offensive, within 24 hours on one road. It would be an illusion to believe that greater concentration would be effected by placing more than this number of corps in rear of each other. The size of the army may thus render it necessary to take up a broader front and relinquish the idea of bringing all troops up for the decisive action in one day.

How much front an army may take up on deployment, I hope you do not expect me even approximately to define, for it depends altogether on the number and distance of the parallel roads leading towards the enemy, on the capacity of the communications which the troops in rear have to use, and on the lie of the land. We have also seen that the question of providing food for the army is decisive in this particular.

At any rate the temptation of taking up too much front on account of the extent of the frontier must be avoided.

Unless the frontier has, like the Ticino border at the time of the first massing of the Austrian army in 1859, such a small extent that the whole army can be concentrated on it whilst at the same time the base is everywhere directly covered, part of the frontier must be left open. In both cases the concentrated position of the army must cover the open frontier indirectly by threatening the flank of an enemy advancing against it.

The powerful magnet of a strong army, as the Official Account expresses itself on the war of 1870, attracts the enemy's forces. Should he resist the attraction of this magnet and cross the open part of the frontier, he must be resolutely attacked in flank with united forces, the situation thus affording the advantage of protecting the base directly in rear while threatening that of the enemy. If this form of the offensive be not taken, following the

example of Gyulai in the beginning of June, 1859, the advantages offered by the situation are voluntarily relinquished.

The next question is which part of the frontier should be covered directly, and which indirectly. Several factors have to be taken into consideration. The point, or rather the zone of strategical deployment, will naturally be chosen so as to cover directly the centre of the base, i.e. the heart of the country, so that the enemy cannot reach it by the shortest routes. The same district would as a rule usually be selected for offensive purposes, because there the forces who in peace time are distributed all over the land can be most quickly assembled, and because on the celerity with which superior forces can be united, depends the decision. If the army be already on a war footing, the place where it can be most quickly concentrated will naturally be selected for the strategical deployment with a view to the offensive. Thus in 1806 for Napoleon's army, which was in Bavaria, on the extreme right of the long frontier of Southern Germany with France on one side and Prussia on the other.

These considerations are subject to modifications if the communications are such that a concentration could be more quickly effected on the flank than in front of the heart of the country. Such a case is not inconceivable, now that railroads have taken away from foot marches the principal rôle in the concentration of the army in the deployment zone. The number and direction of railways is always *the* determining factor for the first deployment, though foot marches are sometimes required for purposes of concentration, in addition to transport by rail. Furthermore, that part of the frontier may be left open, which from its nature is unfavourable for the enemy's offensive, while the open frontier would be covered by the army, as the part of the frontier protected by nature could be better covered by threatening the enemy's advance in flank.

Lastly, with a view to offensive intentions it will be well

to carry out the deployment in a district where the frontier forms a salient angle into the enemy's country, because the heart of the enemy's base is thus approached and seriously menaced.

All these considerations prompted the deployment of the German army in the Palatinate rather than in Upper Baden.

In the Palatinate it was directly in front of the heart of Germany, in Baden in front of its left flank; in the Palatinate nine railroads were available, in Baden only three. In the Palatinate the open part of the frontier was covered directly; the part of the frontier from Lauterburg to Basle formed by the Rhine (an obstacle) was covered indirectly by menacing the enemy's flank, while a deployment in Baden would have reversed the situation. In the Palatinate, moreover, we were nearer to the heart of the enemy's base and could threaten it more quickly than from Baden.

We have agreed that the first aim of strategy should be the destruction of the enemy's forces, and you may therefore charge me with inconsistency because I am speaking of geographical conceptions as its starting point. During the first arrangements for the deployment it is not known where the enemy will effect his, hence it results that in the beginning we have to do with them. We can consider the enemy's army only so far as to make an intelligent guess of the spot where it might deploy, assuming the best possible selection on his part as the most probable. Thus geographical points are made the objectives of the operations, only if the enemy's army is to be found there.

Now the French army could only deploy in Alsace with offensive intention, or in Lorraine behind the Moselle, for the defensive. To meet both cases the deployment of the German army in the Palatinate was the most favourable. Should the enemy act otherwise, then all the better for the Germans.



Matters were less simple for the French army. In Upper Alsace the frontier protruded farthest toward the heart of Germany. For this reason a deployment there was in keeping with offensive tendencies. But the barrier of the Rhine would cause delay to any such movement. In case of the defensive a deployment in Lorraine behind the Mosel fortresses was advisable, the heart of the base being covered there more directly, and a greater number of converging railroads available, than in Lower Alsace. The conflict of these decisive considerations showed itself in the execution. Uncertain whether they were able to take the offensive or would be thrown on the defensive, the French arranged their deployment to meet both cases, each one half-way, the result being that which is the end of all half-measures.

“It is the curse of evil deeds that procreating they must multiply the evil.” Thus the division of the army produced the dispersion above mentioned of the corps along the entire length of the frontier, as soon as it became certain after the 2nd August that the defensive was unavoidable.

The movement of the corps into the zone of deployment by rail and foot marches is preceded by the mobilization. We should endeavour to complete both in the shortest possible time. The events of 1859 and 1870 have taught us that it is not advisable to bring the troops into the deployment zone unready to take the field, completing them there, because the time thus gained is delusive, is, in fact, a loss of time. The French army suffered from this, which was advantageous to the Germans. As to the latter, the Official Account describes how the transport of troops and marches followed immediately upon the mobilisation, as soon as the latter act no longer required the full carrying capacity of the railroads.

It is desirable to hasten the mobilisation and transport of the troops as much as possible. For if the enemy's army is reached but a day or two before the completion of

its mobilisation, parts of it can be defeated with superior forces. This brings us to the question of how much to expect from the railroads.

The Official Account states that in 1870 double track railroads dispatched eighteen, single track lines twelve trains daily. Each train of about 120 axles had a maximum capacity of five-fourths of a battery, five-fourths of a battalion, or five-fourths of a squadron. It would be preferable to embark only entire battalions, squadrons and batteries to avoid breaking up the units. At a pinch, however, one-fifth of the time can be saved by embarking one-fourth more. Hence it took five days to dispatch an army corps with its trains on a double track railroad, and seven and a half days on a single track line. To this should be added the time occupied by the journey. From Berlin to Mannheim, for instance, two days.

On a double track line a train left every hour, on a single track line every hour and a half. In every twenty-four hours a period of six hours was set apart to allow for delays, make repairs, and give some rest to the railway employees. You can calculate for yourself what enormous amounts of rolling-stock are required. If the transit lasts two days, as in the instance given, the train is again available at the starting point after four days at the earliest. If there is to be no delay in the transport, the line must have material available for at least four times 18, i.e. 72 trains.

It is natural for you to ask if there are any means for increasing the capacity of the railways, and if it has been increased since 1870, since it was much greater in that war than that of the Austrian lines in 1859. I am sorry to say I cannot tell you.<sup>1</sup>

The following considerations govern the transport of masses: Two trains must never be in motion at the same

<sup>1</sup> At the present time the capacity of the German double lines is from 15 to 40 trains per day, of the single lines from 5 to 20 trains. The day is divided into six equal periods, of which one is available for repairs, rest, etc.

time on the line between two adjoining stations, the second train must not be dispatched until the first train is reported to have left the next station. This precaution is indispensable to avoid accidents and blocks when one train happens to meet with unforeseen delay. The maximum distance between any two adjoining stations on the entire line determines the minimum of time within which trains may succeed each other along that line. This greatest distance may be reduced one half in warfare by inserting stopping places half-way between each two stations, even where commerce in time of peace has not shown the necessity for such. But there are limits to this idea, for the stopping places must afford the possibility of bringing the train to a halt on a perfect level, otherwise it would not remain still, but might get in motion by itself. This level stretch must be as long as the train plus the distance necessary for bringing it to a halt. A military train is about a thousand yards long.<sup>1</sup> Halting places therefore can only be inserted where the line is level for this length. This in itself limits the number of halting places, especially with lines passing over mountain ranges, where the level portions are few. Nor do long lines, like the one from Berlin to Mannheim, ever run in the plain throughout. A single mountain chain may make unavoidable one single long distance between two adjoining stations and thus regulate the time intervening between trains. Not to mention that roads passing over high mountains, as the Alps, for instance, cannot be worked with long trains, and hence possess smaller capacity.

Add to this that in a plain the number of halting places cannot be multiplied indefinitely. For each must occupy a horizontal stretch of line of at least a thousand yards. If a stopping place were inserted every two miles, the road would consist almost entirely of them.

It follows that the maximum capacities of railroads vary.

<sup>1</sup> This seems a prodigious length, but it is so given by the author "Eine halbe Viertelmeile."—ED.

Of the whole line that part which possesses the least capacity furnishes the measure. For it would only lead to tedious and troublesome accumulation of trains, if over the other parts of the road trains were dispatched at shorter intervals, since they would not be able so to proceed over this one portion.

Thus each line has a different carrying capacity, and I trust you will pardon my ignorance of what it is for various lines. With single track roads delays occur by the meeting of full and empty trains, coming and going; they can pass each other only at the stations.

It is the business of the general staff to consult with the railways in time of peace and determine in conjunction with them the capacity in time of war, and to see whether the necessary means of transport are available.

This part of strategy, therefore, is merely a matter of dry figures; as also are the arrangements of transport for purposes of mobilisation. You thus see how strategy not only depends upon genius and brains, but upon tedious and assiduous work.

When all the calculations for the deployment of the army in the district selected have been made, it becomes the duty of rational strategy to make similar calculations for the enemy's side, in order to judge whether the latter could place an equal force in the field within the same time, and whether he can constrain us to the defensive by putting forward superior forces, or whether during our deployment our forces will be greatly superior to his. In the latter case we may place our line of deployment farther forward and expect quicker results. In the other case we should have to deploy farther back in order to gain time to collect a force sufficient to hold its own against the enemy. To make these calculations with any degree of accuracy it is necessary to know the organization, railways, etc., of the enemy.

I cannot speak of the strategical deployment, now mostly effected by railroads, without naming one element which

plays an important part in war, and the mention of which will perhaps appear ludicrous to you. I mean the boot.

Who does not know what new boots mean! Nobody likes to wear them for a fatiguing pedestrian trip though they may be made by the most skilful shoemaker and the one most familiar with the shape of our foot. But our reserve and landwehr men, three quarters of the combatants, are required to put on a new boot, hard and dry from long storage, after hastily trying it on and greasing it, and to start on the same or following day on a trip by rail of two or three days. Whoever has made a long trip by rail knows that during it the feet swell. Then the boots pinch all the more. If immediately after the long transport by rail, subsequent to mobilisation, the troops are required to make fatiguing marches against the enemy, during which no regard can be paid to their comfort, they will melt away alarmingly from sore feet, especially the infantry. When on the 15th August the Guard Corps was ordered to leave two companies in Dieulouard to watch the passage of the Mosel, it formed them of all the men slightly disabled by sore feet, and there were quite five hundred who required such a rest. This number would have been far greater, had it not been for the fact that upon disembarking at Mannheim the infantry had had one or two days of rest followed by a small ordinary march.

The railway transport to the district of deployment should, therefore, be regulated in such a manner that the foot troops can make a few ordinary marches before or after, to break in their boots. This can be done by detraining the first troops dispatched some distance this side of their destination and sending them forward by foot marches, and by marching the last troops dispatched previous to their embarkation along the railway and entraining them at points located farther forward. The troops dispatched on intermediate days are to be marched for one or two days before and after the trans-

port by rail. Thus the boot is—pray do not laugh—a strategical factor.

Whether due regard was paid to this in 1870, I do not know. I know this, however, that of the troops under my command many had to march from Berlin to Wittenburg before they could be entrained, and that these peace marches greatly increased their marching powers.

In view of the great number of new formations in war, such marches also tend to strengthen cohesion and discipline more than an undisturbed halt at the place of formation would do.

Permit me now briefly to allude to the military value of railroads. On account of the great work done by them this has been overestimated, for many seem to think that troops should for choice be transported by rail. But the advantage derived from their use becomes the less, the smaller the distance to be passed over. During transport the troops are incapable of action, and we have seen how Austrian troops arriving on the battle-field of Magenta from Milan were unable to disembark because the station had fallen into the enemy's hands, and were simply taken back to Milan without taking part in the battle. Transport by rail also invariably impairs the efficiency of troops for the next day. While marching, troops are always ready for action; they reach their destination equally so and gain in efficiency for the future by the training.

If, therefore, the entire body of troops to be transported cannot reach its destination by rail faster than by road, the latter is much to be preferred. The capacity of the lines and the numbers of the troops are the deciding considerations. When, for example, the capacity of the railways in 1870 permitted a battalion to reach its destination, four or five marches distant, in three or four hours, it was advantageous to use it. It would have been different with an entire army corps, which would have required five days to move by rail. In this case, it would have been ordered to march.

This is all so simple that you will perhaps ask why I mention it. But history teaches us that errors have been committed in this direction. It has been calculated that Bourbaki's army could have completed its movement for the relief of Belfort in January, 1870, on foot as quickly, if not quicker, than by rail, considering the small and inefficient means available for transport. The march would have broken in these raw troops. The whole movement would have been better concealed from us, than by the transport *en masse* by rail, of which something will always transpire. The leaders of the French republic would therefore have done better to have put this army in motion by road, restricting the use of railways to bringing up the supplies which the army lacked.

But they possessed neither complete knowledge of, nor experience in, the nature of the means used to conduct a war, especially those needed in strategy.

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In considering all the elements which influence the selection of the zone of deployment, you will admit that they cannot be correctly estimated at the moment of mobilisation. For in our time of universal liability to service and increased rapidity of mobilisation, the dice of battle are cast, as in 1870, within three weeks from the order of embodiment, while these considerations require years of laborious consideration. A state with many neighbours must have made all its preparations in time of peace against every one of them, to avoid a complete breakdown in time of war.

Now you may be inclined to think that the strategical deployment, this starting point of all strategy as you called it, this crown of all strategy as I claim it to be, is nothing more than arithmetical calculation, which any conscientious man (or many together) conversant with addition and division can do just as well as the scientific soldier. The celebrated general who carries off the palm of victory in a

great war, the marvellous art of strategy before which all bow, both lose their lustre in your eyes, and you might prefer to reward the strategist with an artistically wrought penholder rather than with the orthodox laurel wreath. You may also think that the victorious leader is merely reaping the fruit of years of assiduous labour of others.

But even in the arithmetical problem there are many unknown quantities which cannot be properly taken into account without knowledge of their value, without the study of our own and the enemy's forces, and without long military experience and practice, as well as intellectual capacity.

The superiority of force which enables the leader to take the offensive, does not consist merely in the mere number of assembled combatants. Otherwise, how could Cortez have overcome the hundreds of thousands of Mexican warriors with his handful of Spaniards? How could Prince Frederick Charles have dared to take the offensive with an army of 80,000 against Chanzy's 200,000? The value of a given force is a combination of numbers and efficiency of which only the experienced leader can judge. The faculty of doing this must be innate in the man, and he must have trained and schooled himself by assiduous work. Strategy is an art. As with any other art, the natural gift must be purified and perfected by iron application to study and practice. The strategist will only achieve great results when he has made the art of war his life's vocation.

Every art requires for its practice a good instrument. Can the violinist do himself justice on a bad violin, the pianist on a poor piano, the painter with bad colours and brushes? All need good instruments and must be capable of judging their quality. The strategist must be able to judge whether the army is efficient, in the elementary as well as in the practical tactical instruction, in the training of the soldiers, of the officers, of the subordinate leaders,



before he decides whether or not he is strong enough for the struggle.

To place the instrument in a state of readiness requires not alone the preparation of the plan of mobilisation with all its movements by rail and road, and the calculations for the strategical deployment. It is necessary that the instrument be of good construction. In other words, there enters into consideration the manner in which the nation in arms is welded into an army, the organization of the latter, the busy work of the training in peace, the training of man and horse, officers and generals, in drill halls and riding schools, at the target and on the parade ground, at manœuvres as well as in the offices of the staff, the war ministry and the Adjutantur.<sup>1</sup>

For this reason our illustrious Emperor after the victories of 1870-71 expressed his thanks to the officers who had retired before these events, and who by their assiduous application when in the army had contributed to its training.

The fact that years of continuous labour on the part of others prepared the successes, can no more detract from the glory of the successful strategist than the maker of musical instruments can claim the fame of the artist.

But in the art of strategy there enters one element which does not enter into any other art. "Here our will is opposed by the independent will of the opponent." It is not sufficient to know the numbers of the enemy's troops. The hostile force consists, like our own, of a combination of figures and efficiency, which we can only approximately judge. Still less can we estimate correctly the rapidity with which the enemy can complete the deployment of his forces. Every state keeps secret its plan of mobilisation and the railway time-tables intended for use during the strategical deployment. Very little information transpires with regard to these two points. Do you profess to

<sup>1</sup> "Adjutantur" is untranslatable. It is that section of army administration which deals with discipline and orders.—ED.

know even the capacity of any one of our great lines of railroad? Still the strategist must, as we have seen, make his plan for the deployment and adhere to it without flinching. He must not make a single mistake in the original assembly of the forces. "For such errors can hardly be rectified in the entire course of the campaign." This is *the great difficulty* to be contended with in all plans of strategical deployment.

It occurs to me that perhaps I have laid down the rules for the strategical deployment to no purpose. For neither you nor I will ever be in a position to work one out. Those alone can do so who know not only the training and organization of the army, but also the plans of mobilisation and railway transport, i.e. the headquarters staff and the war ministry.

But one advantage at least accrues from this discussion.

In the event of war almost everybody who has ever seen a map makes plans as to how he would defeat the enemy and where he would assemble the army. Each believes his plan would be the salvation of the fatherland. In 1806, a colonel of the general staff submitted to the king a memoir of the most absurd character. How many similar plans may have been presented. Realizing the insufficiency of the knowledge of any private individual, I feel inclined to call it a crime to approach the Supreme Commander at such a moment without being summoned, and consume his time with immature proposals.

I consider that each individual should devote himself in such critical times to conscientious work in his own sphere and concentrate thereon all his energies. What lies beyond, he should leave to those concerned. "England expects that every man will do his duty," is a beautiful saying of the nation so nearly related to us.

From all this, you may judge what I think of the clamour of excited crowds, who attempt to influence the strategical resolutions of the supreme command with

results which have in some instances proved disastrous.<sup>1</sup>

Another result of considering the elements influencing the strategical deployment, and the lack of certainty in many of them, is an inclination to criticise charitably historical events and the unfortunate generals who made mistakes in the first massing of their armies which could not be rectified in the course of the campaign, and which led to defeat. Hence I do not dare to go farther than is necessary to deduce useful lessons from these mistakes. For instance, in 1806 the First Napoleon was uncertain, previous to the battle of the 14th October, where to look for the enemy. The most masterly case of strategical leading (that of the Germans in 1870) credited the enemy with a greater rapidity than he was capable of, and therefore acted more slowly and cautiously than necessary if the condition of the French army had been accurately known. The supreme command of the French army was also uncertain and underestimated the enemy, and was therefore taken by surprise, to its great detriment.

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I will now deal with some possible misinterpretations into which you may be led of the rules proposed by me for the strategical deployment. Others may also arise, for abstract theories hardly ever exactly fit a concrete case. First of all, I have set it down as a matter of principle to complete the strategical deployment before beginning active operations to allow the assembly of superior numbers on the decisive point, and it struck me that you might think I, therefore, condemn taking advantage of favourable opportunities for gaining partial results before its completion. If such be the case, you have not gauged my ideas properly. For I should have to find fault with the victories of Spicheren, Weissenburg and Wörth.

<sup>1</sup> The writer evidently is thinking of the effect of the Parisian mob on MacMahon's march.—ED.

This would be riding the rule to death, and fit to be placed side by side with the Latin proverb, "*Fiat justitia, ruat cœlum.*" It is not always possible to separate strictly in point of time the strategical deployment from active operations, as Napoleon did in 1806 by giving two days of rest, and as the command of the German army in 1870 had intended for the First and Second Armies, when it decided to halt them on the 8th August.

Again, it may not be our intention to declare war before the strategical deployment is completed. When, however, the enemy anticipates us by doing so, no conventional respect for international law should prevent us from turning to advantage favourable opportunities for successes of more or less importance.

Nor should the troops be expected to timidly avoid every contact with the enemy. It would impair their confidence of victory, without which success cannot be expected. Hence collisions are not necessarily to be avoided during the deployment, but under certain circumstances are even desirable.

Thus, the case of an accidental collision between the troops led to the battle of Spicheren, the use of a favourable opportunity to the battles of Weissenburg and Wörth.

At the beginning of hostilities, the veil covering the enemy's measures will be considerably lifted if our cavalry does its duty in reconnoitring and patrolling. From prisoners, we learn the condition and positions of the hostile corps. When discussing Gyulai's operations in 1859, I drew your attention to the lack of reliability in the information furnished by the spies and the tardiness of its arrival compared with the reports from the cavalry.

As early as the 30th July the German supreme command became convinced that an offensive movement of the Third Army southward across the Sauer was not likely to be met by superior forces, invited the attention of its leader to the fact that such a movement would be the

best means for protecting the open part of the Rhine frontier. The offensive was at first defensive in character, but later on was intended to be part of the general offensive acting against the right flank of the enemy, who was presumed to be on the Saar or behind the Mosel. But the Third Army deferred its advance to the 4th August because it had not sufficiently completed its deployment to permit active operations. Thus the supreme command of the German army deliberately brought about an action during the strategical deployment.

Another misinterpretation of my meaning would be, if you were to conclude from the principles laid down, that the whole force should, under all circumstances, be assembled at the same place. In 1870, the central situation of France allowed us to do so. In 1866, we assembled at different points of the country, but, were I to investigate the reasons for the strategical deployment in 1866, I should have to discuss with you the commencement of the war in as much detail as the beginnings of the campaigns of 1806, 1859 and 1870.

Several zones of deployment may be necessary as well as the formation of several armies. It might be necessary to attack several objectives. A thousand modifying combinations may be conceived; but the main thing is that it should be so effected as to meet all eventualities. It must be dictated by calm, deliberate, sound reason. "Theory is grey, the tree of life alone is green."

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Even at the danger of repeating myself, I cannot refrain from inviting your attention to the method of issuing orders adopted by the supreme command of the German army. If you analyse the wording of the telegram of July 30th containing the instructions for the offensive to the south, you will see that it was not at all a direct order to the Third Army to undertake it. On the contrary, it implied the option of abstaining therefrom for

the moment, if local circumstances should render it inopportune, of which the Crown Prince, being on the spot, was alone competent to judge. Nor did the Third Army receive definite orders to assume the offensive from the 4th August. An officer of the headquarter staff familiar with the general plan was sent to it, and communicated the intentions of the former orally.<sup>1</sup> Thus the supreme command of the army guided the masses to unity of action without impairing the independence of army commanders, or interfering with the arrangements made by them. The Official Account gives a definition of the difference between "instructions" and "orders," and I ask you to refer to it.<sup>2</sup>

What was the system of issuing orders pursued in the French army? Without knowledge of the condition of the 7th Corps, and soon after telegraphic inquiry addressed to General Douay, "where are your divisions?" "how far are you with your formations?" and a very unsatisfactory reply thereto, the Emperor ordered him directly to concentrate at Mühlhausen, and on the following day MacMahon stopped the march of these troops by telegraph, and ordered them to Wörth by rail. This produced marches and countermarches, which fatigued the troops and wasted that most precious factor of the strategical deployment—time.

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Lastly, permit me to deduce one more useful application from the principles which I have laid down as governing the strategical deployment.

You have recognized, as I have, that the time within which it is completed is of prime importance. A delay of a single day may give the enemy the advantage, and become one of those mistakes "which cannot be rectified in the course of the campaign." The organisation and

<sup>1</sup> This officer was Colonel (now General) J. von Verdy du Vernois.—Ed.

<sup>2</sup> See Official Account Franco-German War, vol. i., p. 106

efficiency of the army, the plan of mobilisation and transport of troops are all important factors in the strategical deployment. It is the duty of the government to strive for the greatest possible perfection in these particulars, and demand the means necessary thereto from the representatives of the people in time of peace.

## **EIGHTEENTH LETTER.**

### **THE WHEEL TO THE RIGHT OF THE GERMAN ARMY FROM AUGUST 7TH TO 12TH.**

IT is highly interesting and instructive to follow the strategical game which, like one of chess, was played between the French and German armies from the 7th to the 12th August. A discussion of its details up to the first decisive battle will therefore, no doubt, meet with your approval, for the battles of the 6th August had not brought about a decision. They are very properly called decisive victories, although they were so only as far as the participating French troops were concerned. For at Spicheren but one French corps had taken part in the battle, at Wörth, in addition to the 1st Corps, only a few attached divisions belonging to other corps; the major part of the French army had not fought at all.

On the whole the German troops in first line remained on the day after the battles of Wörth and Spicheren where they were. At Spicheren, Frossard had withdrawn from contact with the victor by retreating during the night. The German cavalry sought, and in part recovered, the touch during the 7th. At Wörth the Third Army had entirely lost touch with the enemy.

There has been no lack of critics to find fault with this absence of tactical pursuit and compare with it those by Napoleon after the double battle of the 14th October, 1806, and by Blücher after Waterloo. You have also read the bitter self-accusations of the cavalry for this alleged sin of omission.



We mean to confine ourselves to the strategical part of the conduct of the war. Blume in his discussion of tactical pursuits gives a vivid picture of the condition of the victor, which frequently prevents or weakens them. Hence I might pass over the absence of pursuit on the 7th August. But there were also strong strategical reasons why the army commanders did not insist upon it on that day.

We know that the First and Second Armies had not quite finished their deployment and were not as yet in a position to begin the offensive, when collisions between the advanced troops brought on the battle of Spicheren. Nor was the defeat of the enemy such that—setting aside all other considerations, as Napoleon and Blücher did—there was nothing to do but to keep the enemy moving by relentless pursuit. Sufficient information had been received of the position of the main French army to know that a simple running after Frossard's corps—to express it familiarly—would mean to dash into a hornet's nest and run the risk of a most serious check. The main bodies of the First and Second Armies were still one or two days' marches in rear, in part still on the railways, for, as stated before, the strategical deployment was not as yet completed, hence in the pursuit our main body could not reach that of the enemy. Lastly, in the chance encounter of Spicheren the troops within reach were hurried up as fast as possible in driblets, and used where momentary pressure rendered assistance necessary, and, at the end of the battle, troops of four different army corps (VII., VIII., III., and I.) were intermixed in wooded and mountainous territory. The disruption of all units which invariably takes place in a battle, even on the victor's side, had reached such a degree as to make it impossible to organise a pursuit by the troops in front. Order had to be restored before these could be further used. It was wise, therefore, on the part of the army commanders to send cavalry alone to the front to observe what became

of the enemy, to follow, not to pursue, and to halt the leading corps. Those in rear were in the meantime brought up and the deployment continued. In this way the supreme command adhered rigidly to the original plan which had been recognized as sound.

Of the Third Army we know that the tactical pursuit, begun by cavalry on the evening of the 6th August, ended at the entrances of the difficult passes of the Vosges. It had encountered fresh troops at Niederbronn (Lespart's division of Faily's corps), on which the fugitives rallied. A headlong advance in the night, into the midst of fresh forces, in mountain defiles, would have been senseless. Thus it came about that the French were able to continue their flight during the night, and that the victor was unaware that Lespart's division was carried along by the stream of fugitives, and had no complete knowledge of the state of dissolution of the enemy's forces. That point had also been reached where "the country (Vosges passes) rendered a change to march formation necessary on both sides," and where, therefore, a direct reaping of the fruits of tactical victory had to cease.

According to generally accepted theory the Third Army should have taken up the energetic pursuit by its infantry not later than early on the 7th August. But we know that the deployment of this army was incomplete when on the 4th August the operations began, the primary purpose of which was solely the protection of the Rhine frontier. It was still without most of its trains. It is true a defensive action can be carried on without them for three days, but a movement leading far into the interior of the enemy's country cannot be begun without exposing the army to the danger of a gradual dissolution.

After attaining the object of this defensive-offensive undertaking, before the completion of the strategical deployment, it was time to complete the latter. This rendered it necessary for the main body of the army to remain stationary on the 7th August and to bring up everything

still in rear to the troops, who, moreover, needed urgently a day of rest after their exertions.

This was the strategical reason why the direct tactical pursuit was omitted by the Third Army. It, too, sent forward cavalry only to find out what direction the enemy had taken during the night.

Nor had the cavalry contented itself on the 6th with merely riding after the enemy. Detachments swarming around the hostile right flank reached Pfaffenhofen and ascertained during the night that no enemy had passed there. This fact, and the retreat of one brigade of Lespart's division from Niederbronn in the direction of Bitsch, caused the Third Army to believe that MacMahon had struck out for the main army towards the north-west. Before this assumption was verified, the infantry of the army could not be put in motion, for the proper direction of march was not known. Thirty squadrons and three batteries were charged with securing this information on the 7th. Advancing through Niederbronn and following the trail left by the enemy who had fled during the night to Zabern, leaving clear evidence of the state of dissolution of his forces, they reached the vicinity of Steinburg in the evening, after a march of 38 miles. Their appearance caused MacMahon to make a second night march whereby he succeeded in gaining a start of 24 miles, and the Third Army again lost the touch with the enemy which had just been regained.

During the 7th August the German army reached the following positions :<sup>1</sup>

First Army : headquarters, Völklingen.

VII. Corps :

13th division : Forbach, advanced troops at Morsbach, cavalry patrols as far as St. Avold, which was held by the enemy.

14th division : Stirling-Wendel.

Corps artillery : Völklingen.

<sup>1</sup> I am quoting from the Official Account.

VIII. Corps :

16th division : Drahtzug.

17th division and corps artillery : between Malstadt and Burbach on the Saar, north-west of Saarbrücken.

3rd Cavalry Division : vicinity of Saarlouis, patrols in the direction of Bouzonville (which was free from hostile troops), and Boulay, where the enemy was found near Tromborn.

I. Corps : after completing detrainment reached Lebach and Sand. A short day's march in rear of the VII. and VIII. Corps.

1st Cavalry Division : after partly detraining reached Lebach ; part was still detraining at Birkenfeld.

Second Army : headquarters at Bliescastel.

III. Corps : Saarbrücken.

6th Cavalry Division in front of Saarbrücken, one regiment pushed to Forbach in front of the 13th Division.

5th Cavalry Division near Saargemünd.

IV. Corps on the march from Zweibrücken to Vollmunster, advanced troops near Rohrbach.

Guard Corps : Assweiler.

X. Corps : St. Ingbert.

IX. Corps : Bexbach.

XII. Corps : Homburg.

II. Corps still on the railway.

According to the above neither the First nor the Second Army had been able to complete its deployment on the 7th August ; for only four corps were near the enemy, the remaining five being in rear. I might therefore name the 8th August as the date the deployment was to be terminated. But you must not dispute about this point, for operations and strategical deployment overlapped each other at this time. It was no longer possible, as originally intended and as Napoleon did in 1806, to separate the time of deployment from that of operations by a day of rest.

In the night after the battle the Third Army bivouacked. The V. Corps at Fröschweiler, the XI. Corps at Elsasshausen and Wörth, I. Bavarian Corps at Fröschweiler, the II. Bavarians at Lembach, Reichshofen and Niederbronn. The Wurttembergers at Engelshoff, Gundershoffen and Reichshofen, the Baden Division at Gunstett and Schwabwiller, all on or near the battle-field. One division of the VI. Corps detrained at Landau and was put in motion toward Bitsch by telegraphic order, the remainder was still on the railway.

Excepting the 4th Cavalry Division, which was following the enemy, the Third Army remained on the 7th where it was. Only the 12th division advanced to Sturzelbronn, advanced guard to Herzogshand, and the rest of the VI. Corps as well as the 2nd Cavalry Division assembled at Sulz, as they arrived by rail. This movement was not finished until the 11th August.

With regard to the French army, I have already said that the flight-like retreat of the 1st Corps and parts of the 5th and 7th Corps, was carried on the night after the battle and throughout the following day to Zabern, and that on account of the appearance of the German cavalry, MacMahon continued the movement on the evening of the same day. This night march brought him to Sarrebourg.

The main body of the 5th Corps remained on the 6th at Bitsch, uncertain whether to carry assistance to Wörth or Saarbrücken. Upon telegraphic information of both defeats it made a night march, reaching Lützelstein early morning of the 7th, where it seems to have remained during the day, joining MacMahon at Sarrebourg on the evening of the 8th.

Of the 7th Corps but one division was with MacMahon. The greater part of the remainder had been pushed to Mühlhausen. There, early on the 7th, the news of the defeats and also rumours of the appearance of German troops in Upper Alsace were received, which caused these troops to retire at once toward Belfort, and with such haste,

that the retreat assumed the character of a rout. The corps began to assemble at Belfort on the 8th, reached by the 12th a strength of 20,000 men and 90 guns, and was then, between August 17th and 22nd, transported to the army of Châlons at Rheims by way of Vesoul, Langres, Troyes and Paris.

Upon the news of the defeats of the 6th August it was decided at the headquarters of the French Emperor, to assemble the whole army at Châlons. Hence the 6th Corps (Canrobert), while *en route* by rail to Metz from Châlons, was ordered to remain at the latter place and have that part of its troops brought back which had already been sent on to the former place.

The 3rd Corps retired behind the German Nied by way of Faulquemont, leaving a strong rear-guard at St. Avold (with which the German cavalry came in touch). The 4th Corps retired to Boulay, the Guards to Courcelles-Chaussy.

Frossard arrived with his defeated 2nd Corps at Saargemünd early on the 7th after a night march, and there picking up Lapasset's brigade of the 5th Corps, continued his retreat on the same day to Puttelange, where information reached him from Imperial Headquarters, that it was intended to continue the retreat to Châlons.

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In connection with the resolutions arrived at on this day I must refer to the principles laid down by various military writers on the subject of retreats. In a retreat the condition of the troops is important. A voluntary retirement may be made by troops who have not fought, perhaps have not even come in touch with the enemy. This was the case with the 3rd, 4th and Guard Corps of the French army on the 7th August. A retreat may be compelled by the unfavourable issue of an engagement, as the 2nd Corps after the battle of Spicheren. Lastly, a routed army may seek safety in an unrestrainable flight, as did the 1st Corps.

In the first case the leader has full command over his men, in the second case he can still make some general arrangements and perhaps count upon some specially reliable troops.

If all are in full flight, the leader can only yield to the general current and endeavour, by interposing a certain distance between his troops and the hostile army, to arrest tactical pursuit. Only when he has succeeded in doing this, can he restore order and get the masses in hand.

My good fortune, as I wrote you once before, has spared me experience in retreating. But I have frequently conversed with men of ample experience in this particular. For instance, the Duke Eugen of Wurtemberg, a Russian general of note in the campaigns of 1813 and 1814, stated that if a body of troops were retreating in full flight (and he said that might happen to the best in the world) no attempt should be made to stop them, least of all by calling them insulting names. If the honour of troops is injured by such language they no longer have regard for it. That there was nothing to do but to address to them words of approval and designate a place in rear, beyond the enemy's fire, as a rallying-point. That there the masses would stop of their own accord, could be re-assembled and restored to order.

General von Reyher had much experience in marches to the front and rear, being the staff officer of Katzeler, who commanded the advance and rear guards of York's corps in 1813, 1814 and 1815. During a staff tour<sup>1</sup> one of the officers, charged with preparing the order for a retreat after a lost battle, designated troops which were to keep in touch with the enemy. Horrified at such a suggestion, Reyher said, in his drastic way: "What, keep touch with the enemy? that we certainly do not seek for

<sup>1</sup> A tour in which the officers taking part in it conduct an imaginary campaign, working out all the details, drawing up all the orders, etc., as they would have to do if actually in the field.—ED.

after a lost battle! That is just the time when we don't want anything of the sort. When we have lost a battle, we thank God if we neither hear nor see anything of him."

You see, both the tactician and the strategist agree that a certain distance is to be placed between one's own and the enemy's troops, in order to escape from the influence of the opponent and thus regain the advantages of activity and the initiative, or, at any rate, the possibility of independent action. We must therefore declare it perfectly sound on the part of MacMahon to hasten his retreat and allow it to continue until he found time to restore order. This he probably began at Sarrebourg on the 8th August, where the junction with Faily's intact troops gave support to his own soldiers. On this date he was also enabled to resume superintendence, for he divided the retreating army into three parallel columns, and probably, too, he was able to form a rear-guard of reliable troops.

In the second case I have mentioned, this should be done immediately.

I am convinced that, although history does not say so, Frossard formed his rear-guard during the retreat to Puttelange from Lapasset's intact brigade of the 5th Corps, which he found at Saargemünd.

In conducting a rear-guard and covering a retreat, General Reyher, whom I just mentioned, had great experience. When he was Katzeler's staff officer, the latter, with his well-known peculiarities, confidently left the arrangements to him. In his old age Reyher was fond of telling how Gneisenau instructed him, and how he carried out his instructions, in selecting rear-guard positions and delaying the enemy without giving him battle. How the enemy would come up, stop, reconnoitre, extend for attack in order to turn the flank of the position. Before the enemy was quite ready to assault, the rear-guard would leave its position and the enemy had to resume march-formation and thus lost time, especially



when the rear-guard position was covered in front by an obstacle that could only be crossed by a bridge. It was important, said Reyher, not to commit oneself to a serious engagement and not to hold the position long enough to give the enemy time to turn or surround it with superior numbers, for if the rear-guard were defeated and thrown upon the main body, the latter, instead of being covered, would be compromised.

So much for the tactics of a rear-guard covering a retreat. The strategical part of such a retreat consists in taking into consideration the length of the line of march of the troops to be covered, and then their condition, allowing for accidental delay, to ascertain how long the rear-guard can keep the enemy in check, before it starts on its own interrupted retreat. If the tactical qualities of the rear-guard position do not correspond to these requirements—for instance, if it can be turned easily and with little loss of time—the rear-guard must ensure the necessary delay, by taking up a second position on the same day.

The voluntary retreat of intact troops without touch with the enemy Napoleon ordered on the 7th August for the Guards, the 3rd, 4th, and all the troops of the 6th Corps which had already reached Metz. The vicinity of Châlons was designated as the point to which the retreat was to be made.

On the whole nothing can be said against the soundness of these arrangements. To unite the army behind the Mosel for the next stand to be made, to post MacMahon at Nancy, Bazaine's army from the latter point to Metz might have been an arrangement open to discussion. But the question would have arisen if, in view of the rapidity of his retreat, which indicated a good deal of disorder, MacMahon could so far have restored order in his army by the time he arrived at Nancy, as to render it capable of obstinate resistance. This question cannot be absolutely answered in the affirmative. It is also questionable if Douay's Corps could have been brought up in time from

Belfort to Nancy; but there was ample time to get it to Châlons. There MacMahon's troops found a week's rest to restore and fill their ranks, for by using the railways they still further increased the start gained.

The concentration of the entire army at Châlons made the movements of the 3rd, 4th, 6th and Guard Corps a voluntary retreat. It became the same for the troops of MacMahon, Faily and Frossard, as soon as they had succeeded in freeing themselves from touch with the enemy, i.e. when the latter could no longer overtake them while they remained in motion.

For a retreat of this character the eccentric form, as Hoepfner called it, is the most suitable. During the discussion of Gyulai's retrograde movement across the Ticino I remarked to you how troops when falling back are delayed by the fact that their trains must cross every defile before them. This causes delay and benefits the pursuer who marches in front of his trains. Add to this that the least misunderstanding in the first case may produce fatal loss of time, while delays with the transport in the second instance affect the pursuer but little, causing him at the worst only to be a little late. It follows that a retreat should take place on as many parallel roads as possible in order to shorten the length of the trains and of the columns of troops and overcome any delays as quickly as possible.

Blume objects to an eccentric retreat, stating that a voluntary dispersion of the forces cannot but be welcomed by an enemy who knows his business. The objection holds good when the victor has vanquished the whole of the enemy's army and when the pursuer has remained in touch with the retreating troops. But the eccentric retreat can always be used when this is not the case. It has the disadvantage, however, that those troops who march by divergent roads must afterwards cover greater distances and undergo greater exertions to reach the rallying-point designated. This disadvantage ceases when

If, however, the retreat is to be short, Blume is right in objecting to the dispersion of the forces and in preferring that the troops be held together.

All the more inexplicable it is to me, why the four corps, Guards, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Corps, retreated on Metz in a concentric direction. It was bound to result in confusion among the masses of trains and troops that could only be put straight with much loss of time.

But the power of attraction of a big fortress was still great in those days. The vague ideas of the protection offered by its ramparts to a large army were only cleared up by the events of 1870. To-day we should hardly march so large an army through the defile which a fortress always forms, but rather pass by it on one or both sides and profit by its power of defence.

The Third Army, as ing led to believe,

on the 7th August, that MacMahon had marched on Bitsch in the direction of the main army, communicated its opinion to Royal Headquarters. The latter, by a telegram to the Second Army, suggested the idea of intercepting MacMahon on the 8th at Rohrbach with its cavalry and the corps available in first line on the left wing. Prince Frederick Charles, acting at once on the suggestion, extended the advance of the IV. Corps on the 7th August as far as Vollmünster, the head of column going to Rohrbach, as we have seen above.

In addition to this and in order to avoid friction and misunderstanding, the supreme command, on the 5th August, assigned the road from Saarbrück to St. Avold by telegraphic order to the Second Army, and directed that the First Army was to keep to the north of it. This order did not reach the latter until the 7th, and that, together with the idea just mentioned of intercepting MacMahon, and the necessity of bringing the corps in rear up to the first line, brought about the movements of the First and Second Armies on the 8th August. A misunderstanding, which arose at this time, created some trouble. The commander of the First Army, on being informed that the III. Corps might *possibly* be used against MacMahon, believed that this corps *had* already marched and that its place was to be filled from his force. This caused some countermarching, a rare occurrence in the German army during this war.

8TH AUGUST.—The positions of the German troops were as follows. The Royal Headquarters were at Homburg from the evening of the 7th.

First Army :

VII. Corps :

13th Division : Klein Rossel.

Advance guard : Ludweiler.

14th Division : Forbach to St. Avold.

VIII. Corps : Spicheren.

Advanced guard : Etzling.

3rd Cavalry Division : Derlen.

## I. Corps :

1st Division : Volklingen, Puttlingen.

2nd Division : St. Wendel.

1st Cavalry Division : St. Johann and Lebach.

Second Army : headquarters Saargemünd.

II. Corps remained at Saarbrück, 6th division advancing to Stirling-Wendel, advance guard at Forbach.

X. Corps : Saargemünd.

Guard Corps : Gross Rederching.

IV. Corps : at Rohrbach in the morning ; when it turned out that MacMahon was not retreating that way, it advanced to Lorentzen.

IX. Corps closed up to Bexbach.

XII. Corps concentrated at Homburg.

The cavalry divisions of the Second Army were, for the present, attached to the corps as follows :—

1 brigade of the 5th to the IV. Corps, between Lorentzen and Saarunion.

2 brigades of the same to the X. Corps, near Puttlinge and Saarlbe.

6th cavalry division to the III. Corps, pushing its advanced troops toward St. Avold, and to near Bionville by way of Longeville, following up the enemy's rear-guard when it left that place.

The Guard and XII. Corps had their own cavalry divisions. Thus the IX. Corps, which was in second line, was the only one limited to its divisional cavalry.

Altogether, the First and Second Armies had now six corps in first line (VII., VIII., III., X., Guards and IV.), three corps in second line (I., IX., XII.). The II. Corps was still coming up by rail.

You will thus see the idea was not to have for the offensive more than two corps in rear of one another.

The front of both armies was somewhat less than 29 miles.

The Third Army was in the direction of

Nancy. It was not deemed advisable to allow the cavalry to cross the ridge of the Vosges first. The troops reached :—

12th Division : Herzogshand, with the head of its column near Bitsch.

II. Bavarian Corps : Egelshardt, and towards Bitsch.

I. Bavarian Corps : Barenthal.

V. Corps : Uhrwiller, with the Wurttembergers as an advanced guard at Ingwiller.

XI. Corps : Pfaffenhofen.

4th Cavalry Division remained at Steinburg.

Baden Division was detached to invest Strassburg, and arrived at Brumath.

The Third Army had thus a front of 14 miles, and marched, as a rule, with no greater depth than one corps.

The remainder of the VI. Corps (the 11th Division) and the 2nd Cavalry Division were still assembling in rear of the army.<sup>1</sup>

The fortress of Bitsch was reconnoitred, and shots exchanged with it.

On the part of the French army, as we have seen, MacMahon joined Faily's corps to his own fugitive troops on the evening of the 8th, and these, after their night march, were resting at Sarrebourg.

Before Metz, the idea of retiring to Châlons was again given up. There was some fear of the impression which such a considerable retrograde movement would make on public opinion, and it was decided to take up a position on the French Nied east of Metz. By bringing up the 6th Corps and Cavalry Reserve from Nancy, it was hoped to unite there some 200,000 men, which number, while not equal to that of the Germans, would permit the French to turn to advantage any unforeseen accident, and defeat parts

<sup>1</sup> The transport of these troops by rail was impeded by the trains of wounded and prisoners coming in the reverse direction, and was not completed till the 11th August.—ED.

of the German armies should their numbers compel them to extend themselves.

Thus the fact that the German army had not, as yet, completed its strategical deployment and was compelled, after the success at Spicheren, to abstain from pursuit, served to encourage the French army to further resistance. I shall, later, invite your attention to the disastrous influence on the fate of France which this regard for public opinion had.

The 3rd, 4th, Guard and 2nd Corps were ordered to move into the position named, and the 6th Corps to resume its transport to Metz.

Since these troops did not come in contact with the Germans during this movement, we may omit the details, and state that by the 10th August the position on the Nied was occupied as follows :—

3rd Corps in the centre from Pange to Courcelles-Chaussy.

Guards close behind it.

4th Corps on the left, from Les Etangs to Glattigny.

2nd Corps on the right, at Mercy le Haut, Lapasset's brigade in front.

It was now decided, at German headquarters, to execute the great change of front to the right, which had been in contemplation ever since the beginning of the war, in case the French army should execute its strategical deployment in rear of the Mosel fortresses. For the continued retreat of the French corps on the 7th and 8th August could not but indicate that they meant to do so.

It is highly instructive to study the orders issued to this effect, their laconic brevity, omitting everything unnecessary, leaving full liberty of action to the army commanders. On the 8th August, a telegram of four lines sufficed to instruct the First Army, it now received one of three lines for the 9th, while the Third Army received an equally short telegram on the same day. The instructions for the entire movement comprised in twenty

lines. They were issued from General Headquarters on the evening of the 9th.<sup>1</sup>

Gyulai's headquarters in the war of 1859 would have written as many pages for the same purpose.

Still the laconic style of the orders of the supreme command did not prevent it from giving detailed instructions where such interference was deemed necessary. In these days, we find almost every telegram enjoining the strategical use of cavalry, sometimes in two words, "Cavalry forward!" I shall spare you the discussion of this subject, since I went into it sufficiently when we corresponded on cavalry.

Very interesting and instructive in the letters of the 9th August is the assignment of the territory for marching to the three armies, and the limitation of the several portions by certain roads, leading in the direction of the enemy. The armies made a similar division among the corps, and these among the divisions, when a corps had several parallel communications at its disposal.

9TH AUGUST.—It was in keeping with the general movement that the First Army (the pivot) should remain more or less stationary during the same. The Second Army had also to halt at least one day for the left wing, and two days for the right wing, while the Third Army advanced.

This brought the armies into the following positions on the 9th: Headquarters at Saarbrücken.

First Army as on the 8th, except that the I. Corps was assembled at Püttlingen, the 1st Cavalry Division at St. Johann.

Second Army:

III. Corps was to advance to Forbach, but pushed forward as far as St. Avold, the latter place having been evacuated by the enemy.

X. Corps crossed the Saar at Saargemünd.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 262, Official Account.



Guards and IV. Corps remained at Rederching and Lorentzen.

In the second line the

IX Corps reached St. Ingbert.

XII. Corps Habkirchen.

II. Corps began to detrain at Neunkirchen.

The cavalry pushed forward in front of the Second Army discovered the presence of large hostile bodies in front of the right wing and ascertained that there was no enemy in front of the left wing.

Third Army :

12th division, compelled by the fortress of Bitsch to make a detour, reached Schorbach and Lengelsheim by a night march through Haspelscheidt.

II. Bavarian Corps passed round the south of Bitsch and reached Lemberg.

I. Bavarian Corps Enchenburg, cavalry Montbronn.

The Wurttemberg division bombarded the mountain fort Lichtenberg, which surrendered after some resistance ; the main body of the division reached Meisenthal.

V. Corps marched to Weiterswiller, advanced troops to Eckartswiller ; a garrison was placed in the abandoned fort Lutzelstein.

XI. Corps reached Hattmuth and Dossenheim.

10TH AUGUST.—The First Army as a whole did not move forward, but had to yield a little to the right, to avoid trenching on the territory allotted to the Second Army for its advance.

Headquarters moved to Lauterbach.

I. Corps to Creutzwald.

VII. Corps to Carling and L'Hopital, advanced guard to Porcelette and Guerting.

VIII. Corps to Lauterbach.

1st Cavalry Division to Ludweiler.

3rd Cavalry Division to Uberhorn.

Of the Second Army :—

- III. Corps remained at St. Avold.
- IX. Corps advanced beyond Saarbrücken.
- X. Corps to Puttrelange in rear of the IX.
- XII. Corps concentrated at Habkirchen.
- Guards moved to Saaralbe.
- IV. Corps to Saarunion.

The cavalry in advance of the four leading corps scouted as far as the French Nied, Baronville, Raville, Eschwiller, even to Pfalzburg and Sarrebourg, and ascertained that the French army had arrested its retrograde movement at the French Nied and assembled there.

The Third Army had to move its right wing to the left to make room for the Second Army. The

12th Division marched to Rohrbach.

I. Bavarian Corps to Diemeringen.

II. Bavarian Corps to Montbronn.

Wurttembergers to Adamswiller.

V. Corps to Weyer.

XI. Corps to Metting and Mittelbronn.

4th Cavalry Division followed the XI. Corps to Metting.

The XI. Corps bombarded Pfalzburg without result. The investment of this fortress was turned over to the troops of the VI. Corps.

Here occurred a misunderstanding which teaches a lesson. The useless cannonade with field guns was caused by an order to the XI. Corps to invest the fortress. A clerical error in the order turned "einschliessen," meaning to invest, into "einschiessen," to bombard, which shows how carefully every letter in orders should be written and checked.

The information received here left no doubt that MacMahon's army had retreated by way of Sarrebourg to Luneville.

On the part of the French, MacMahon had in the meantime continued his retreat and, crossing the Mosel at Bayon on the 11th, had gained a start of some 38 miles.

He directed his troops to the railways in the upper valley of the Marne, commenced to entrain them at Manois on the 16th and assembled his corps on the 19th in the camp of Châlons.

Failly had received various orders, now separating him from MacMahon, now directing him on Langres, now on Paris, now on Toul, and finally ordering him to join MacMahon at Châlons. He joined the army on the 20th and 21st. We have already mentioned, that the 7th corps (Douay) arrived there also before the 22nd. The 12th corps (Lebrun) was being formed at this place. MacMahon was given the command of these four corps, which for the present concern us no more.

That on the 10th August the army of Metz took position on the French Nied, I have already mentioned. It is to be noted that the Supreme Command of the German army received an intimation of this on the same day from the cavalry.

11TH AUGUST.—The First Army, in accordance with the plan of a wheel to the right of the entire front, remained stationary. Its cavalry scouted as far as Condé-Northen, at the junction of the French and German Nied.

Of the Second Army the four leading corps (III., X., Guards, IV.) reached the line Faulquemont-Hellimer-Guéblange-Haskirchen. In the second line stood the IX. Corps at Forbach, the XII. in front of Saargemünd.

The advance guards of the four corps in first line were pushed well forward. Their cavalry was still farther to the front and its patrols scouted up to the Seille at Nomény, and as far as Chateau-Salins, Marsal and Sarrebourg.

The Third Army continued its advance with four corps (I. Bavarian, Württembergers, V. and XI. Corps) and reached Pistorf, Ramwiler, Altroff and Sarrebourg. The right wing (12th division and II. Bavarian Corps) had to halt at Lorentzen and Diemeringen, lest it should collide with the left wing of the Second Army.

Pursuant to the directions emanating from the Supreme Command, the 4th Cavalry Division was pushed to the front and reached Heming, its advanced troops St. Georges and Langette.

It is interesting to note on this day, that the First and Second Armies independently arrived at conclusions, and made corresponding proposals, entirely coinciding with the ideas of the Supreme Command.

The First Army expressed its intention of advancing on the 12th in the direction of the enemy and moving as far as the German Nied. The Second Army developed the idea of menacing the flank of the enemy's position behind the French Nied by an advance towards the Mosel, while the First Army held him in check in front. The Supreme Command gave the needful orders in this sense for the next day's movements.

Great caution was necessary in making this move, and it is interesting to note the arrangements ordered for the purpose. It was known that the French army, consisting of four corps, was concentrated on the French Nied. These four corps, if finally put on a war footing, might be about as strong as six Prussian corps.<sup>1</sup> Reinforcements by rail from Châlons were also reported. Though the First and Second German Armies together were superior to the French forces, they could not with safety be allowed so to extend themselves in the advance as to render possible one of those "unforeseen accidents," for which the French were hoping, some partial success to balance the mishaps of Spicheren and Wörth.

Orders were therefore given to close in upon the III. Corps at Faulquemont; the First Army to make a general advance half-left, the Second Army strengthening its right wing by bringing up the corps in second line and completing the wheel to the right by bringing up its left wing to closer touch with its right.

<sup>1</sup> The French army on the Nied numbered about 200,000 men. See Official Account, vol. i., p. 280.—ED.

Thus we see that there were five corps on a front of 12 miles to withstand the first shock of a hostile offensive, and that four other corps were near enough to support them on the same day, i.e. during the course of the battle.

12TH AUGUST.—The First Army moved as follows :—

I. Corps to Boulay and Halling.

VIII. Corps to Niederwisse.

VII. Corps to Marange.

The Second Army stood :

III. Corps at Faulquemont.

IX. Corps at St. Avold and Longeville.

X. Corps at Landroff.

Guards at Morhange.

XII. Corps at Barst and Horsthaut.

Only the IV. Corps, which marched to Munster, could not have come up in support in one day's march.

The II. Corps was approaching from the rear. Those portions of it which had disembarked at Neunkirchen, were ordered up in the direction of St. Avold.

The several cavalry divisions were reconnoitring in front and on the flanks of the enemy. Thus the 3rd Division as far as Les Etangs in rear of the French Nied. The cavalry of the Second Army to beyond Pange and on the left as far as Nancy. An entire brigade of the 6th Division advanced to Laquenexy, but was pushed back at Ars-Laquenexy by large bodies of infantry. Grigy, Borny and Servigny were observed, and cavalry advanced by way of Fleury and Magny-sur-Seille to a point  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles south of Metz. A detachment of cavalry even entered Pont-à-Mousson, but was surprised by the enemy and dispersed while engaged in destroying the railway and telegraph. In the direction of Dieulouard patrols reached the Mosel and ascertained that there was no enemy in the town and that the railroad was in full activity. An attempt was made at Frouard to destroy the line. One squadron of the 5th Cavalry

Division rode into Nancy (38 miles in advance of the IV. Corps to which it was attached), which was not occupied by the enemy.

After crossing the Vosges the Third Army concentrated on the 12th August with four corps and the Wurttemberg division on the line from Fenestrangle to Sarrebourg, a front of 12 miles:

II. Bavarian Corps at Fenestrangle.

I. Bavarian Corps at Bettborn.

Wurttemberg division at Rauwiller.

V. Corps at Altroff.

XI. Corps at Sarrebourg.

The 12th Division remained at Saarunion in rear of the left wing of the Second Army.

The 4th Cavalry Division advanced to Moyenvic and demanded the surrender of Fort Marsal without success. One squadron took possession of Luneville.

The VI. Corps was put in march toward the Vosges from Hagenau to follow the army.

The German armies had thus on this date finished their change of front to the right.

They now stood close together on a line the general direction of which—from Boulay to Faulquemont and Sarrebourg—is approximately parallel to the Meurthe-Mosel line from Nancy to Metz, and has an extent of a little over 38 miles.

The information sent in from the front by the cavalry was so complete as to remove any doubt which the Supreme Command might have entertained as to the further intentions of the enemy.

It was recognized that the enemy had abandoned the idea of offering resistance on the French Nied in front of the First and Second Armies or of taking the offensive thence, but was, on the contrary, beginning to withdraw to Metz.

In fact the leaders of the French army had found the position on the Nied tactically unfavourable and decided

to concentrate the army close in front of the fortress of Metz. The idea of advancing to encounter the German army in the open field was abandoned in view of previous experience.

I will spare you a fresh reference to the injurious consequences of such changes of plan on the part of the supreme command of an army, for I have sufficiently explained them with reference to the campaign of 1859.

Whether this lack of confidence in the offensive power of the French troops was justified, I doubt in view of their performances which I, practically and personally, experienced when in action on the 14th, 16th and 18th August.

But what do you say to this, that the French staff ordered the occupation of a position in their own country and only became aware a few days later that the position was not suitable? Would such a thing happen to our staff?

The resolution on the part of the French to abandon the position on the Nied completely changed the considerations which governed the strategical measures of the Germans.

## NINETEENTH LETTER

THE DECISION FROM AUGUST 13TH TO 18TH, 1870.

THE retrograde movement of the French army from the French Nied to close in front of the fortress of Metz deprived the commander of the German armies of the opportunity of defeating the French force decisively on this side of the Mosel, unless the latter should resume the offensive. For, standing near the forts of Metz, it was in a position to avoid a defeat on the right bank of the river at any time by withdrawing within the protection of the forts. Rather might the Germans have expected to overtake it beyond the Mosel, should the French retire through Metz. A retreat of the large masses of the French army through Metz would of necessity require much time and give the German army an opportunity of reducing the start—of at least one day's march—which the retreating enemy had gained. The time had arrived for carrying out the idea of turning Metz by the south and pushing the hostile army northward away from its base, the heart of France. The next thing to do was therefore to secure permanently the passages of the Mosel which the cavalry had reached, but could not hold by itself. This would in the first place deprive the enemy of the railroad connection between Metz and Châlons by way of Frouard, and keep away further reinforcements which, as the cavalry reported, he was bringing up from Châlons.

For this reason the leading division of the X. Corps was pushed on to Delme from Landroff on the afternoon of the 12th by orders from Royal Headquarters. Hence

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this division had to make two marches on this day (altogether nearly 24 miles) and at night was far to the front and in an exposed position.

You see here plainly what may be risked by one who has placed himself in a position to lay down the law, who has secured for himself the advantages of activity and the initiative.

Next morning this division had to be supported by reinforcements and by the advance of neighbouring corps, which were also charged with securing the passages of the Mosel.

If then, as was intended, the Second Army should cross the Mosel later on, there was some danger, while the French army stood on this side of Metz, that the latter might collide with the flank of the Second Army and gain a partial success. This danger was met by the First Army being in readiness, in its turn, to take in flank such a movement of the enemy. But the latter might also be attacked by superior forces. It therefore had to be sure of support from troops in rear as well as from the Second Army on its left. Hence (and this was the leading consideration for the 13th August) the corps of the right wing of the Second Army must remain near the First Army long enough for this purpose.

Should the enemy begin a retrograde movement through Metz, it must be delayed as much as possible, to prevent those troops engaged in crossing the Mosel, from being crushed by superior numbers. In the worst case the latter would have to fall back to the south on the left bank of the Mosel, where they would find support from the Third Army which was crossing at Nancy, while the First Army, crossing close to and south of Metz, would have followed the enemy.

The extremely laconic order from the Supreme Command of 4.30 p.m., 12th August, gives expression to this plan and is exceedingly instructive and worthy of consideration.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Official Account, vol. i., p. 293.—ED.

In a few words it informs the armies of the enemy's position and of their own tasks. The details of the execution are left to their discretion. It loses no time in setting the imagination of the subordinate commanders to work on speculation as to what would have to be done later on when the Mosel was crossed. It avoids all "strategy of the future." I again remind you of the long disquisitions emanating from Gyulai's headquarters with orders for weeks in advance for all possible and impossible cases.

But the laconic brevity of the orders did not prevent the Supreme Command from taking all possibilities into consideration and being ready with remedies, as appears from the statements of the Official Account. But such considerations of future emergencies were not communicated in the dispositions.

On the 12th August the French Emperor relinquished the command of the army to Marshal Bazaine and directed him to take it back to Verdun. "All experienced men in the army were convinced of the necessity of continuing the retreat to Châlons."

It is difficult to resist the temptation of asking what Bazaine should have done toward the solution of this problem.

I, having accurate knowledge of the positions of both parties, and these events having passed into history, can display considerably more wisdom than Bazaine could in those days, and I arrive at the following result:—

Every delay was fatal. A continuation of the retreat on the 12th was out of the question, for according to his own work, Bazaine was not placed in command until the evening of that day. But the movement should have begun early on the 13th. The whole army with its numberless train could not pass through the fortress in one day. Again, the accumulation of so many columns and trains at the three bridges over the Mosel within the fortress could only result in dire confusion. The 13th

August should therefore have been utilized to send the trains and ammunition columns ahead through Metz as far toward Verdun as possible, to conduct the combatants across the Mosel outside the fortress, and secure the points of passage near Metz.

I mean that of the five corps two of the right wing should have moved to Pont-à-Mousson and Corny respectively, two of the left wing to pontoon bridges below Metz. One corps (Guards) might have remained on the 13th under the guns of the forts and followed the retreat on the 14th by passing through the town.

If the columns and trains could not get such a start toward Verdun on the 13th August as to allow of a simultaneous retreat of all the corps from the Mosel toward the Meuse, the army must hold the defiles of the river from Dieulouard to below Metz on the 14th and begin the retreat toward the Meuse and Verdun on the 15th by five parallel roads.

The question is whether the troops would have been able to reach the defiles in time. On the 12th the right wing of the French army stood approximately on the line from Frescaty to Ars-Laquenexy and nearer to Pont-à-Mousson than the division of the X. German corps which had been pushed forward to Delme. An army corps directed on Pont-à-Mousson might thus on the 13th have met this division on the march, with considerable numerical superiority, and have thrown it back with ease in a south-easterly direction. Another corps could have reached Corny without coming in conflict with the Germans. It would have been sufficient to send a battalion by rail to Dieulouard and one to Frouard in order to anticipate the enemy in occupying the dams and bridges over the valley and river at these points and to begin their destruction, while reinforcements were coming up on foot.

Such a movement was practicable and advisable, provided only that Bazaine were as well informed about the enemy as the latter was about him, and that he was entirely untrammelled in the exercise of his command.

But this was not the case. Thanks to the indefatigable activity and alertness of the far-advanced German cavalry, thanks to the defective use of the French cavalry, which rarely pushed its reconnaissance beyond the infantry outposts, he knew nothing of the dispositions of the German army. As to the independence or otherwise of Bazaine, the Official Account gives us to understand, that his hands were tied by the presence of the Emperor, exercising no command, but with his numerous retinue of incompetent advisers. Under these circumstances I can easily imagine the course of official business at the French Headquarters, Bazaine having to submit his plans to his sovereign for approval before he could issue the orders. This explains easily why the orders were not issued until some time on the 13th and the resumption of the retreat fixed for the 14th. The fact also that the change in the supreme command happened on the 12th August, on the very day on which the most important decisions ought to have been arrived at, may have served to cause the fatal delay, since Bazaine had to make himself first of all acquainted with the entire situation of his army.

The precious 13th August was thus lost by the French Supreme Command. Granted that already from the 6th to the 12th the French had been compelled to relinquish the offensive, to regulate their steps by those of the enemy, to accept the law from him, they were after the 13th certainly no longer in a position to carry out strategical measures unfettered and without tactical interference on the part of their opponent. From day to day they were driven back by the enemy. Nor was the German Supreme Command willing to relinquish this advantage by a wilful loss of opportunities. Unflinchingly it pursued its aim, gave no rest to the enemy, disturbed and assailed him wherever he could be reached, until he was so enveloped that his destruction was certain.

You will no doubt charge me with inconsistency because I am criticizing the steps taken by the Supreme Command of the French army, although I professed the intention of

drawing lessons only from facts. Still we deduce two important lessons from those just criticized. In the first place the advantage of a correct use of cavalry in reconnoitring and screening is patently demonstrated. This point has been discussed so much by others as well as by myself, that I content myself with the remark that the strategical value of cavalry has hardly ever been so fully illustrated by the facts as at this time.

In the second place, the chains which bound the unfortunate Marshal Bazaine on this decisive day, prove how harmful is the influence of a "retinue of incompetent advisers." It is true, neither of us may ever be called upon to remove such advisers at a decisive moment from a Royal Headquarters. Still we can at least deduce the one practical lesson that never, even if we should have the opportunity, ought we to descend to the level of such "incompetent advisers." However much we may disagree with the plans made, however wrong they may appear to us, it is our duty to rest contented and not offer our uncalled-for opinion, because by such unvolunteered advice we can only do harm, delay decisions, impede action, and interfere with the continuity of the steps to be taken.

The position reached by the German army on 13th August, while the French army remained inactive in front of Metz, was as follows :—

The First Army took position with two corps (VII. and I.) on the French Nied on a front of  $9\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the railway station of Courcelles to Courcelles-Chaussy, the four divisions in one line, in which order they had marched so as to be able to give mutual support. The advanced guards were pushed beyond the Nied, and the outposts, in touch with those of the enemy, stood on a line from in front of Laquenexy to Ogy and Retonfay. The VIII. Corps stood five miles to the rear on the German Nied at Bionville, Varize and Helstroff. In rear of the First Army three brigades of the II. Corps, just detrained, were assembled at St. Avold on this date.

Of the Second Army the III. Corps moved to Bechy and Buchy, the IX. to Herny, the XII. to Thicourt. These three corps were thus already on the enemy's right flank, while a march of about 8 miles would bring them to the support of the First Army.

Of the three other corps the leading division of the X. moved to Pont-à-Mousson, occupying the same evening Dieulouard with infantry, the other division following to Delme; the Guards marched to Oron and Lemoncourt, the dragoon brigade reached Dieulouard and caused by its fire four railway trains coming from Châlons to turn back, before the battalions of the X. Corps arrived to occupy the place. The IV. Corps reached the vicinity of Chateau Salins.

The cavalry of both armies was scouting above and below Metz, to the Mosel and beyond it from Pont-à-Mousson as far as Regniéville-en-Haye, half-way to Thiaucourt.

The Third Army reached on the 13th and 14th August the vicinity of Nancy, the cavalry divisions far in front, without meeting any enemy.

Thus on the evening of the 13th the passages of the Mosel at Dieulouard and Pont-à-Mousson were in the hands of the Germans and connection by rail between Metz and Châlons was interrupted. Part of the 6th Corps had thus to remain at the latter place.

The French and German armies were now in close touch. At any moment a battle might develop, as at Spicheren and Wörth. For this emergency three corps of the First Army were in readiness and could count upon the prompt assistance of three more corps from the Second Army.

Reconnoitring made it certain that the entire French army had remained inactive in its camp all day. The retreat through Metz had not yet begun. Thus it was not impossible that it meant to deliver an offensive blow on the 14th.

If on the one hand the German Supreme Command meant to profit by the good fortune which had delivered the passages of the Mosel into its hands without a struggle, permitting it to overtake the enemy on the farther bank should he continue his retreat, yet on the other hand a collision with the enemy, or even an offensive movement on his part from Metz toward the east and south, was quite possible, and might have placed the German corps in an embarrassing position, should they be unable to concentrate in sufficient force.

The German Supreme Command provided for both of these considerations, and its orders for the 14th brought the three corps of the left wing of the Second Army and a strong force of cavalry over the Mosel, while six corps were grouped together in the immediate front of the French army, and another (the II.) was brought up within supporting distance in rear of the First Army.

The order in question is very interesting and instructive.<sup>1</sup> In this instance it is somewhat longer than usual, covering twenty printed lines. It communicates plans concerning two separate actions, the defensive on the right and the rapid advance on the left wing. It is hardly possible to convey in fewer words than this order does, the views of the Supreme Command. That these were comprehended, is demonstrated by the events of the next day.

As already stated, the French Supreme Command issued orders on the 13th August for continuing the retreat in the direction of Verdun. On the 14th the 1st and 3rd Reserve Cavalry Divisions were to march first by the road from Gravelotte to Doncourt-Conflans, and Mars-la-Tour respectively, the 3rd and 4th Corps to follow the 1st Cavalry Division, the 2nd and 6th Corps the 3rd Cavalry Division. The whole army to be ready to march by 5 a.m.

This order invites criticism. A simple calculation as to the length of the columns and rate of march should have

<sup>1</sup> See Official Account, vol. i., p. 299.—ED.

shown that a cavalry division and two corps could not march through Metz in one day. The last troops could not have started before the morning of the 15th. Leaving out of consideration the fact that it was useless to fatigue the troops by keeping them in readiness to march from 5 a.m. on the 14th, the method of carrying out the movement was such that the enemy would be sure to discover it from seeing the preparations of the leading troops for the march, while the French would probably relax their watchfulness because occupied with the idea of retreat. This all shows a lack of practice in strategical administration on the part of the French staff. Endless checks in the marches were the inevitable result.

A French officer told me afterwards that during the movement through Metz he was sent by his commanding general to Bazaine to report, that the corps could not march, as all the roads were crowded with troops; Bazaine, who was irritated, replied: "Very well, take a bye-road." As if there were bye-roads available in a city in which the passage was restricted to certain bridges!

14TH AUGUST.—Pursuant to the orders issued on both sides, the following movements took place:

In the early morning the numerous trains of the French army began to cross the river; the troops following about noon.

The First German Army had orders to remain stationary and to observe whether the enemy was about to retire or advance to the attack. The movements in retreat in the hostile camp were observed by the German outposts. The general commanding the I. Corps visited the outposts and called his divisions to arms, and the commander of the advanced guard of the VII. Corps followed the enemy's retreat, which began in the afternoon, and attacked him in order to check it. Thus a brief statement of the intentions of the Supreme Command as communicated in the order of the previous day, enabled the subordinate leaders



to take the initiative in conformity thereto without waiting for fresh orders.

Such action in accordance with the intentions of the higher leaders without waiting for exact orders, is only possible when the subordinates are men whose previous training has taught them how to appreciate the requirements of the situation. Such men are needed to lead army corps and divisions and even advanced guards.

The German army now began to gather the results of years of schooling in the peace manœuvres and staff tours.

The battle of Colombey-Nouilly arose from the situation. Although General von der Goltz, commanding the advance guard of the VII. Corps, did not attack before 4 p.m., yet all the troops of the two leading corps of the First Army, as well as those of the right wing of the Second Army, shared in the conflict before dusk had set in. For the subordinate leaders, knowing the general situation and the duties assigned to them, upon hearing the sound of guns immediately took a direction which led them to the place where they could take the most effective part in the battle.

Those of the French troops whose lines of retreat were not yet free, returned to the assistance of the attacked force, and thus after darkness had put an end to the strife, had to pass the night on the right bank of the Mosel.

In a strictly tactical sense the action was a victory for the German troops only in so far as they had maintained their positions within effective range of the fortress guns on the farther slope of the Vallière brook, which they had crossed in the course of the battle. But there were no trophies to testify to the winning of a great fight, which had cost so much. The fortress and the attitude of the enemy alike precluded pursuit.

The French rightly extol the bravery and bearing of their troops. Since the retreat of the army had been decided on and ordered before the battle, they claim that the retreat after the battle was not the result of the action

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and that the latter was not lost, and Bazaine reported to the Emperor that he "had not been defeated."

The argument as to which had the right to claim the tactical victory, is idle from a strategical point of view, for in the latter sense the result of the battle of the 14th August was a great success for the Germans. The French army was held back and the last troops could no longer reach their destinations on the 15th; indeed, considerable numbers had to camp the next evening near the forts and on the island of Chambière within the fortress. The battle caused such a confusion among the trains, that on the day succeeding it they were still blocking the roads of retreat, and the resumption of the latter to the Meuse, originally ordered for 4 a.m. on the 16th August, had to be postponed until the afternoon.

This shows that the battle so delayed the retreat of the French, that the German army was able to arrest it completely by the battle of Vionville-Mars la Tour on the 16th August.

Strategically speaking, the three battles of the 14th, 16th and 18th August form but one conflict in which the German army struck the French three successive blows.

The battle of Colombey did not interfere with the advance of the German armies, as the marches ordered for the 14th had been accomplished before the battle began. On the evening of the 14th August the Germans stood as follows :

The First Army :

I. and VII. Corps on the battle-field at the Vallière brook, in their rear the VIII. Corps.

The Second Army :

III. Corps at Vigny and Louvigny, 7 miles south of Metz.

IX. Corps at Buchy, Luppy and Bechy. One division marched to the battle-field in the afternoon and took part in the action.

XII. Corps at Solgne.

II. Corps at Faulquemont.

IX. Corps assembled at Pont-à-Mousson, advance guard half-way to Thiaucourt.

Guard Corps, front at Dieulouard, rear at Sivry.

IV. Corps at Armancourt, 7 miles from the passage over the Mosel at Marbach.

Thus on the evening of the 14th two entire corps held the passages of the Mosel south of Metz; another was only 7 miles, and three more (III., IX. and XII.) a short day's march from the river.

Two brigades of cavalry in front of the X. and Guard Corps ascended the plateau and scouted beyond Thiaucourt to Toul and Reney, some 19 miles, sending in information that there was no enemy to wrest the passages of the Mosel from the German infantry.

Under the supposition that the French army was still on the eastern side of Metz ready to take the offensive, and before the news of the battle of the 14th had arrived, the German Supreme Command had ordered for the 15th August that the First Army should remain stationary and that the three corps (III., IX. and XII.) of the right wing of the Second Army were also to remain where they were. The three corps of the left wing (X., Guards and IV.) were to establish themselves on the Mosel, the cavalry was to advance beyond, and the II. Corps to close up in rear. For as long as the French army remained on the right bank, prudence was advisable, and there was no reason for a precipitate advance over the river, if only the passages south of Metz were secured and information obtained as to what was going on west of the town. The latter task fell to the cavalry.<sup>1</sup>

15TH AUGUST.—Early in the day the commander of the

<sup>1</sup> It may be well to draw attention to the fact that neither the Cavalry of the First nor that of the Second Army fully carried out Moltke's intentions. He wished them to cross the Mosel and surround Metz on the west. But the 3rd Cavalry Division never went to the left bank, and only the 5th Cavalry Division really advanced in the way directed by the Supreme Command.—Ed.

Second Army received the first news of the battle of the previous day from the Royal Headquarters. The telegram laid down the duty of the Second Army in the brief words: "Pursuit on the road Metz-Verdun important." This left to the Second Army full liberty in disposing of its various corps.

On the same morning the King, with his staff, visited the battle-field of the previous evening. Here he convinced himself with his own eyes, that the entire army of the enemy was in retreat, and that an offensive on his part on the eastern side of the fortress was no longer to be apprehended. The moment this became clear, it was necessary to send over the river all available forces as quickly as possible, to cut the enemy off from the Meuse and from his base.

The necessary orders were at once sent to the two armies. The I. and VII. Corps, the troops of which had all been engaged the day before, were to remain in the positions they held before the battle. The IX. Corps, which had also been partly engaged, was only to make an inconsiderable movement westward. All the other troops of both armies were to move to and over the Mosel, beyond which more cavalry than heretofore was to be pushed far to the front.

The different corps reached the following positions on the 15th August:—

First Army:

I. and VII. Corps on the French Nied.

VIII. Corps at Orny, Buchy, Chérissey, south of Metz.

Second Army:

III. Corps at Novéant below Pont-à-Mousson, where the bridge had been found intact and the Mosel could be crossed.

IX. Corps at Verny.

XII. Corps at Nomény.

II. Corps at Han-sur-Nied.

X. Corps. one division at Thiaucourt, one at Pont-à-Mousson.

Guards Corps crossed the Mosel at Dieulouard, head at Les Quatre Vents, rear at Dieulouard.

IV. Corps at Marbache and Custines on the Mosel.

In this way four points of crossing, Novéant, Pont-à-Mousson, Dieulouard and Marbache, were each in possession of one Corps (III., IX., Guards and IV.) and were ready to move against the enemy the next day. Three more corps (VIII., IX. and XII.) were only 7 miles from the Mosel ready to follow. The II. Corps was still 19 miles away from the river.

The two cavalry divisions (5th and Guard) which had ascended the plateau beyond the Mosel in front of the X. and Guard Corps, continued their reconnaissance on the 15th. The Guard Division, finding no enemy in its front, detached its dragoon brigade to Thiaucourt to the X. Corps. The 5th Cavalry Division, scouting to the north and north-west, came at several points in more or less serious contact with hostile cavalry, and finally bivouacked at Xonville, Puxieux, and Suzemont, south-west of Mars-la-Tour, in sight of and in touch with superior hostile cavalry encamped between Vionville and Mars-la-Tour. It observed a force of some 20,000 of the enemy bivouacked near Rezonville.

These French troops consisted of the 1st and 3rd Reserve Cavalry Divisions which had begun their retreat from the other side of Metz on the previous day, and probably also of troops of the 2nd and 6th corps.

The 5th German Cavalry Division thus barred, on the evening of the 15th August, the one great (the southernmost) road leading from Metz to Verdun.

Now that the enemy's presence on the left bank was known, the only thing to do was to attack and defeat him, and at the same time to cut him from the Meuse more effectually than could be done by a cavalry division.

The measures taken by the Supreme Command of the

army for the 16th August as expressed in the instructions issued at 6.30 p.m. on the 15th, met the situation.

This time they take up a whole printed page.<sup>1</sup> Still they are again of exemplary brevity, and I am unable to find in them a single superfluous word. You will perhaps trace a difference between my view and that of the German Supreme Command, the latter speaking of victory and pursuit, while I have expressed the opinion that no tactically decisive victory was gained on the 14th. Now, the engagement of that date was simply an engagement brought about by General von der Goltz following up the enemy. The fact that the attacking troops finally held the ground which was the objective of their attack, gave them the right to claim the victory; but the main point is, that the French army had begun to retreat, while the forts precluded any direct tactical pursuit.

The Second Army was therefore charged with the indirect strategic pursuit, and the First ordered to follow in support of it with all the troops not required to invest Metz. The VIII. Corps was therefore ordered to Lorry and Arry on the 16th, the 1st Cavalry Division to Fey on the Mosel, the VII. Corps to Pommerieux, five miles east of the river.

There may be some difference of opinion as to what constitutes "following up" and what "pursuit." I think it is not necessary for a retiring army to be defeated in order to be pursued. I think that "pursuit" depends upon the action of the force pressing it in rear. If it merely moves in the wake of the other and halts whenever it meets resistance, it merely "follows." If it attacks as soon as it reaches the retiring opponent, it "pursues."

In telegraphing early on the 15th August to the commander of the Second Army, "pursuit on the road Metz-Verdun," the Supreme Command intended the former to

<sup>1</sup> See Official Account, vol. i., p. 351.—ED.

attack the enemy wherever met, in order to retard his retreat.

On the 7th August, after the battle of Spichenen, as well as after that of Wörth, our cavalry was directed to follow in order to observe whither the enemy went, i.e. the cavalry was merely to observe, not attack, the enemy when found.

It is characteristic of the Supreme Command to note how it again gives full liberty to the Second Army to make its own arrangements, contenting itself with merely indicating the possible line of retreat of the enemy.

Prince Frederick Charles had, in the meantime, taken steps entirely in accord with the instructions subsequently received. He ordered the 5th Cavalry Division to be reinforced by the 6th, the III. Corps to march on Mars-la-Tour and Vionville, the X. on St. Hilaire and Maizeray, placing both corps, for the present, on the southernmost line of retreat of the enemy. The Guards and IV. Corps were directed to Bernécourt-Rambécourt and Saizerais respectively. Cavalry to scout to the Meuse. The IX. Corps to follow the III., the XII. the X., pushing its leading troops to between Pont-à-Mousson and Thiaucourt. The II. Corps was ordered to Buchy.

Perhaps you find fault with these arrangements as directing only the right wing of the Second Army on the enemy's line of retreat, while the left wing, Guards and IV. Corps were striking into space towards the west. But was it accurately known how far the enemy had gone? The fortress of Metz prevented any observation as to how much the engagement on the 14th August had interfered with the enemy's retreat. It was quite possible that the trains, and those troops which had begun their retreat from the Vallière brook at 1 p.m. on the 14th, might have reached the Meuse at Verdun in three days, i.e. on the evening of the 16th. In that case, an attempt must be made to anticipate them on the other side of that river.

Cavalry and a camp of 20,000 mixed troops had been observed at Rezonville on the 15th. They might have been the last troops of Bazaine; to detain and surround which the III. and X. Corps were pushed forward. These two corps could be supported by the IX., and on the following day by the XII. and the First Army.

We both know now that early on the 16th all the troops of Bazaine were close to and in Metz, and so little in condition to march that the resumption of the retreat was deferred to the afternoon. This could not be known at German headquarters on the evening of the 15th. One cavalry brigade escorted the Emperor to Verdun in the morning.

16TH AUGUST.—The following were the movements:—

The 5th and 6th German Cavalry Divisions surprised in the morning the camps at Mars-la-Tour, Vionville and Rezonville, which were alarmed, and the French cavalry thrust back.

In the course of the day the III. and X. Prussian Army Corps, following in rear of the cavalry divisions, were engaged in the battle of Mars-la-Tour against the entire French army. Towards evening the German troops received assistance from the foremost troops of the IX. Corps (following in rear of the III.) and from the VIII. Corps of the First Army, the advance guard of which, on being informed of the fighting, had hurried forward to the assistance of the troops engaged, from Lorry and Arry, *vid* Corny.

In the evening the French army broke off the fight, and remained passive, facing south, parallel to and facing the southernmost of its lines of retreat, Metz-Verdun.

Opposed to it were, greatly reduced in numbers and exhausted by the battle against almost three-fold superiority, the troops of the 5th and 6th Cavalry Divisions, the Guard Dragoon Brigade, the III. and X. Corps and the heads of the VIII. and IX. Corps. The rest of these two corps was close at hand, and somewhat farther



in rear the XII. from Pont-à-Mousson to Thiaucourt. One day's march, south of the battle-field on the road Dieulouard-St. Mihiel, was the Guard Corps, its rear-most division at Bernécourt, and its advanced cavalry brigade scouting to St. Mihiel and Commercy on the Meuse. Farther to the south, the head of the IV. Corps had reached the vicinity of Toul, failing in its attempt to take this fortress by a *coup de main*; its rear extended to Marbache on the Mosel. The VII. Corps reached Pomerieux, the II., Buchy.

The Third Army stood on the evening of the 16th August as follows:—

XI. Corps at Bayon, advance guard beyond the Mosel on the River Madon.

V. Corps on the Meurthe at St. Nicholas and Rosières, advance guard on the Mosel at Richardmenil and Basse Flavigny.

Wurttemberg Division at Sommervilliers.

12th Division at Arricourt.

I Bavarian Corps at Einville.

II. Bavarian Corps at Nancy, one cavalry brigade at Toul (which it bombarded) and in touch with the IV. Corps.

4th Cavalry Division advanced to the road Toul-Colombey.

The VI. Corps and the 2nd Cavalry Division followed in rear to Blamont and Montigny respectively.

It was ascertained that Faily's corps had retired towards the Southern Vosges.

Whoever has followed the events of the 16th August on the map, must be surprised that Bazaine, if he wanted to continue the retreat in the direction of Verdun in the afternoon, failed to deal a blow to the south at daybreak with the numerous troops encamped at Rezonville, driving back the German cavalry, which had been there since the 15th. He could not possibly expect to retreat by a road on which since the 15th German shells had

burst, if he remained inactive until the beginning of the movement. The troops used for this blow (2nd and 4th Corps) should have been used as a rear guard on the afternoon of the 16th and on the 17th August, if the enemy had brought large bodies of infantry from the valley of the Mosel to the plateau.

Bazaine's failure to make this move and form a rear guard can only be explained by his thinking it impossible for the German infantry to be so near. It recalls the incredulity with which the Duke of Brunswick received the news of the occupation of Naumburg two days before the battle of Auerstaedt. Thanks to the activity of the German, and to the misuse of the French cavalry, Bazaine was totally ignorant of the fact that German infantry had reached the passages of the Mosel two days before, and he may have taken the German cavalry which molested him on the 15th for an advanced scouting party, which, in view of the strength of his army, he hoped to brush aside with ease. For, had he known that hostile infantry had arrived at Pont-à-Mousson and Dieulouard on the evening of the 15th, he might have calculated that by the morning of the 16th he would have had to meet quite considerable forces at Mars-la-Tour. This is another instance of the often-discussed strategical value of cavalry.

17TH AUGUST.—As to the movements made by both sides on this date, we both have expressed our surprise, as have other critics, that Bazaine ordered a retreat of his entire army to the position of Point du Jour—St. Privat in the morning, although he again considered and professed himself “unbeaten.” You and I know very well now that the intact reserves of the French army in position and ready for battle amounted to more than all the opposing Prussian forces, and that the latter were fatigued and exhausted by fighting, and could receive no reinforcements until after several hours, in some instances only after a day's march. It would appear, therefore, that as early as possible on the 17th, Bazaine should have

attacked with all his fresh troops, sending, under cover of the battle, his trains and the troops engaged on the 16th toward the Meuse along the northern line of retreat. A gain of some distance to the front was as good as assured, especially for Bazaine's right wing, which would have to cover the retreat should he cut himself adrift from Metz, and which had decidedly gained ground during the battle of the 16th.

If then, toward noon, he had met fresh German troops in the vicinity of Gorze-Hagéville, he might have stopped his attack and formed the troops engaged into a rear guard on the southern road to Verdun.

The events of the 16th positively invited him to throw back the left of the army. For his right wing had gained, his left wing had lost ground during the battle, so that facing at first to the south-west, the French army in the end faced south. The plateau north of the battle-field permitted a movement to the rear across country on a broad front, so that the roads could be given up to the trains. There were also very good parallel bye-roads and passages over the water-courses, of which the Orne, 9½ miles beyond Rezonville, was probably the nearest. Behind the Orne it would have been well to assemble the troops shaken by the battle of the 16th August, and restore order. I must admit, however, that such an operation on the 17th could have been carried out only by a master hand, and would have required the intelligent co-operation of subordinate leaders well trained and capable of independent action.

To discern the proper moment for passing from the offensive to the defensive, forming a rear guard and beginning the retreat, would have required unerring generalship and great skill in execution.

Yielding to the natural attraction which a fortress exercises on all who leave the field of battle for their own safety (the wounded and stragglers) Bazaine conducted his army to a position in which the country from Point du

Jour to St. Privat offered many advantages, with the disadvantage, however, of facing west and having the fortress in rear. Thus he voluntarily relinquished communication with his base.

Bazaine himself has stated that he could not leave Metz on account of a lack of ammunition. But the roads were full of trains on the 15th, and if during the battle of the 16th the ammunition columns had been directed through St. Privat to Auboué, it would not have been necessary to go to Metz for ammunition. At any rate, an army does not march back to its ammunition, but the latter proceeds to the army whenever called for. Bazaine's reason is not a valid one.

His decision is capable of explanation in another and very natural way. Bazaine had been foremost in the turmoil of the battle from beginning to end. He had come into such personal contact with the charging Prussian cavalry that he had to draw his sword. An aide-de-camp was cut down by Prussian horsemen by his side. He was with that wing at Rezonville which had been compelled to fall back, and against which the enemy continued to attack without ceasing long after dark. Of the progress of the right wing he had probably no exact information when he ordered the retreat on Metz. Much shaken by the battle, by the excitement and turmoil in which he had been involved, surprised perhaps by the sudden appearance of such large bodies of the enemy where as yet he had taken no steps to ward off danger, ignorant of what reinforcements the latter might be able to bring up, as his cavalry had failed to furnish him with any information, he may have been in such a state of mind as to believe the entire army to be lost if separated from the fortress; and thus have given the fatal order. I must confess that, if I imagine myself in his place on the evening of the 16th, I can understand that his nerves may have been shaken and that he resolved on a course which he would not have taken if perfectly composed. By the sudden appear-

ance of such large masses of the German host he may have been placed in a state of mind similar to that of Gyulai when the latter suddenly became aware, that after all the entire hostile army had crossed the Sesia at Vercelli.

Perhaps you meet me with Blücher's answer to Wellington's request for assistance, while he was lying on a bed of suffering after the battle of Ligny. This comparison only proves that Bazaine was not a Blücher, and Blüchers are not found every day.

At any rate, strategical arrangements made in the turmoil of battle, should not be subjected to such adverse criticism as may be elaborated afterward in the closet. We should approve them if we can find no fault with them; and should not direct hostile criticism against a general whose plans have been unfavourably influenced by the events of a battle unless we have shown that we ourselves are capable of preserving the objectivity of our minds in similar positions. It is only the arrangements which have been worked out at the desk that we may claim to criticise, and then only if we know accurately how the situation presented itself to the judgment of the army leaders in the light of the information they were possessed of. For this reason Goltz says very properly in his "Nation in Arms," that it is preferable to place the commander-in-chief of an army beyond the reach of the impressions due to the events of the day. If, during a great battle, he can find a point from which he can overlook the whole, well and good; but in view of the range of modern weapons and of the large masses engaged in these great conflicts, this can rarely be the case.

Bazaine ordered his army to occupy a position with its back turned to the fortress of Metz.

Upon the news of the battle of the 16th August, in which apparently the entire French army had taken part, the German Supreme Command gave in the first place the necessary orders to support the troops engaged as quickly

as possible, in case the enemy should take the offensive on the 17th. We know that the nearest help would have had to come from corps which were half to one day's march distant. They were all ordered to march in the direction of the decisive battle-field. It was only when the troops which had been severely tried in the battle of the 16th were rendered secure from disaster by reinforcements, that further attacks could be thought of. This could not happen before the 18th at the earliest.

Already while the battle was in progress, and in the belief that only part of the French army was engaged, the German Supreme Command, as well as that of the Second Army, had taken steps to bring the nearest corps (VII., VIII., IX. and XII.) in full strength to the vicinity of the point of conflict on the 17th, while the orders for the Guards and IV. Corps were not changed. It was intended that they should reach the Meuse and there overtake such parts of the enemy as might have escaped. The II. Corps had already been ordered to advance on the 17th to Pont-à-Mousson. When, however, it became certain toward evening, that the entire French army was assembled at Rezonville and Mars-la-Tour, the corps were ordered to hasten their approach, and the Guards also to move thither, covering the line of the Meuse by cavalry only. The orders of the IV. Corps, directing an advance on Boucq, were not changed.

17TH AUGUST.—In pursuance of these orders the corps reached the following points :—

The VII. Corps crossed the Mosel at Corny by bridges thrown during the night, reached the plateau with the 3rd Cavalry Division by noon, and had a little skirmish with the enemy at the Bois de Vaux, whence the entrenched position of the latter was visible.

The VIII. Corps stood on the left of the latter at Rezonville, which was evacuated by the enemy at 11 a.m.

The IX. Corps took position at Flavigny west of the Bois de Vionville.

The III. Corps with the 6th Cavalry Division from Flavigny to Vionville, extending back to Buxières.

The X. Corps with the 5th Cavalry Division at Tronville to the left of the III.

The XII. Corps on the left at Mars-la-Tour, extending back as far as Puxieux.

The Guard Corps bivouacked in the evening at Hannonville-Suzemont.

The II. Corps stood in reserve at Pont-à-Mousson a full day's march from the battle-field.

It is an accepted principle that for the decisive battle one can never be too strong. The Supreme Commander of the German army, as mentioned once before, carried out this principle with the most rigid consistency in the battle of Koeniggrätz, not detaching even a single man for secondary purposes, such as the observation of the fortress of Josephstadt. With this in view one may ask whether the Second Army could not have drawn toward it the IV. Corps (which on the 17th stood echeloned from Marbache to Toul) to participate in the battle instead of continuing its march westward to Boucq.

If Gorze, the headquarters of the Second Army during the night, had been placed in telegraphic communication with the IV. Corps, the latter would have received the order before starting on the morning of the 17th, and by marching some 19 miles over several roads, would have reached the vicinity of Essey,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles south-west of Thiaucourt. There it would have been no farther from the battle-field than the II. Corps at Pont-à-Mousson, and might thus have formed a reserve in case of a battle on the 18th, or at the latest would have done so by the 19th.

Such a movement of the IV. Corps would have necessitated an oblique movement to the right on the part of the Third Army. At any rate, the II. Bavarian Corps on the right flank would have had to relieve the IV. before Toul on the 17th. By a march of about 18 miles from Nancy it could have echeloned itself along the line

Toul-Boucq and invested Toul. It would of course have been necessary for the Second Army to apply to the Supreme Command for permission to act as suggested, which would have entailed some loss of time.

The Official Account does not mention the possibility of such a step, and merely states that between 10 and 11 p.m. the headquarters of the Second Army at Gorze, at a time when the sole idea was to succour the troops that had been engaged, could not count upon the II. and IV. Corps on the next day, because they were two long marches distant from the battle-field. For this reason their orders were not changed, and they marched in obedience to the latest instructions upon Pont-à-Mousson and Boucq respectively.

I can only surmise that there were urgent reasons for leaving the IV. Corps in the direction of Boucq, otherwise, agreeably to the principle just mentioned, it would no doubt have been brought up for the battle. It may have been either the impossibility of timely transmission of the orders in the absence of telegraphic communication, or the advisability of letting the corps pursue the direction already indicated, rather than to send orders the execution of which could not be relied upon. Possibly there was some fear of too great an accumulation of troops entailing such confusion among the trains as to jeopardize subsistence. In the latter case it was better to have one corps less before the enemy, rather than to have the whole army weakened by hunger. This idea is suggested to me by the statement of the Official Account as to the difficulties already experienced in the previous days of providing sustenance for such large concentrated masses.

However this may be, the corps went to Boucq on the 17th and did not participate in the battle on the 18th August.

The Official Account also mentions that the Supreme Command did not at all consider a timely support of the leading corps by the XII. and Guard Corps on the 17th as absolutely certain, but that the foresight of the leaders



of these corps made them hasten their approach to the desired point.

I cannot refrain from mentioning that this foresight an initiative arose directly from the manner in which the corps had been accustomed to be dealt with by the Army Commander since the beginning of operations. Only the general situation and the tasks imposed were prescribed all details being left to them for execution. They had thus become used to acting independently, and, whenever they knew the situation, to anticipate the plan of their commander. Had the latter daily prescribed every detail to his subordinate leaders, as for instance Gyulai did in the May campaign of 1859, there would have been no independent action on their part, they would have waited for orders.

Having been an eye-witness, I can give you the details of the arrangements made by the Guard Corps for the 17th:—

On the 16th August the corps had marched:

Cavalry Division to Aprémont, scouting to the Meuse  
2nd Division to Rambucourt, advanced guard half-way to Aprémont.

1st Division to Bernécourt.

Corps Artillery to Beaumont.

In pursuance of the orders given to march the next day to the Meuse, all the details for the 17th had been arranged on the completion of the march, so as to move by the Aprémont road to St. Mihiel (headquarters) and beyond, along which road the whole corps stood echeloned on the 16th.

But on arrival at Bernécourt at 12.30 p.m. on that date we had heard distant artillery fire in a northerly direction, and His Royal Highness, the general commanding, sent two officers to a height about 5 miles distant to see and report. These officers could not see anything from it, but heard the noise of battle more distinctly. They therefore rode towards it, remained on the field

until 6 p.m. and then returned late at night to Bernécourt. They brought favourable news of the battle, but reported that all the troops of the two corps had been thrown into the fight and were apparently opposed by the whole French army.

The general could evidently not march northward without further orders. For if the battle resulted in a complete victory for us, it was intended that his corps should cut off the retreat of the remnants of the defeated enemy to the west of the Meuse. As it seemed more probable, however, that the two corps engaged at Vionville—Mars-la-Tour would need assistance, than that he would have to march to that river, and that the former case would call for greater celerity, he gave orders at 2 a.m. to rouse the troops, and collected them partly on, partly north of the road heretofore followed. Here they were told to wait for orders to continue the march, either to the north or to the west. The points of assembly were to the north of Bernécourt, viz. :—

Cavalry at Heudicourt.

2nd Division Richécourt.

1st Division Flirey.

Corps Artillery at Beaumont, on the road hitherto pursued.

The troops were thus drawn nearer to those engaged on the previous day, which was advantageous if they needed assistance. On the other hand the Guards could march from these points towards the Meuse just as well as from the quarters previously taken up for the night, if ordered so to do, and in the meantime the return of the officer who had been sent to Thiaucourt to obtain orders was awaited. While the troops were assembling, he brought the instructions given in the Official Account, which directed the Guard Corps to march on Mars-la-Tour by way of Beney and Chambley.<sup>1</sup>

Three different roads were available leading north and

<sup>1</sup> See Official Account, vol. i., p. 430.

uniting at Hagéville, south of Chambley. All these were used, the westernmost from Heudicourt to St. Benois for the Cavalry Division, which was to leave one brigade to observe the Meuse; the road from Richécourt to Essey and Beney for the 2nd Division, which was to be followed by the Corps Artillery; lastly, the 1st Division used a country road from Flirey to Hagéville east of and parallel to the 2nd, leaving free the straight road from Thiaucourt to Mars-la-Tour, on which the XII. Corps was to march.

Notwithstanding the terrible heat of the morning, the heads of the columns reached Hagéville at 10 a.m. and the corps was assembled there at noon ready for battle, i.e. at a point  $14\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Bernécourt in a straight line. This rapid march was rendered possible by the use of three parallel roads. Had the corps marched on one, it would have taken five hours to march off and as many more to re-assemble. It is a striking proof, that under certain circumstances troops marching on several parallel roads are more concentrated than when crowded on a single one. On this day the roads were so near together, that we could see each other as well as the XII. Corps which were marching very near us for the greater part of the way.

Short columns greatly facilitate marching on hot days. We had not a single case of sickness due to the heat.

Had Bazaine attacked early on the 17th, this approach of the Guards and XII. Corps would have decided the fate of the day.

An order sent to Hagéville directed, as the enemy had withdrawn, that the march should be continued to Hannonville-Suzemont on the southern road Metz-Verdun, instead of to Mars-la-Tour. Here the corps bivouacked, as already stated.

I have reminded you several times, that troops marching on one road are not always as concentrated for battle as when they use several parallel roads; and you wished me

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to give a general rule for this purpose at the first opportunity. Common sense dictates it.

A large body of troops on the march should use several parallel roads, rather than one road, for the purpose of quickly assembling for battle, provided they are so close together, that the troops can march across country for mutual support more quickly than they can deploy to the front, if marching in one united column.

For instance, an army corps consisting of two divisions had better use two parallel roads, one for each division, if the distance between them be less than the depth of a division on the march.

This mathematical rule is not universal, and is modified by the accessibility of the interlying country, the condition of roads, etc.

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In the course of the 17th August various reports were received at German headquarters, speaking now of a retreat of the enemy to Metz, another time of one to Verdun, or of a divided retreat in both directions. In general the view seemed to prevail that the enemy was, on the 18th, still in front, in a northerly direction. That was the direction in which he had to be attacked. But to push him off his line of retreat and throw part or all of his forces into Metz, the attack was to be so ordered, that the left wing should first advance to the assault. This brought about a complete wheel to the right during the battle of the 18th, and to a large extent even before the battle. For eventually the front of the Germans during the action was toward the east. This change of front on the part of the German army was greatly facilitated by the fact that the French army executed the same movement rearward in the afternoon of the 17th and morning of the 18th, thus making room for the Germans. It did exactly that which the German army meant it to do.

This was curious! What the German army strove to

do to ruin the French army, the latter did of its own accord and believed to be its salvation.

After a bitter and bloody struggle on the 18th the French army was pushed from its position and compelled to retire under the guns of the fortress.

The tactical course of this mighty battle does not belong to the sphere of strategical considerations. Strategically only the advance from the left wing of the Germans to cut the enemy from his base deserves to be mentioned. I will, however, deal with one episode of the battle which is of strategical character, and proves that the subordinate leader, especially when he has command of a corps, may under some circumstances obey his orders best, not by following them to the letter, but by weighing the premises on which they are based, and then acting in harmony with the general designs of his commander.

At 10 a.m. Prince Frederick Charles sent an order to the Guard Corps to march to Verneville and take up position there in support of the IX. Corps.

When the general commanding received this order, his first division was forming at Doncourt and his hussars reported that French infantry was at Ste. Marie and large bodies of troops at St. Privat. From these reports it was inferred that the premises on which the order of Prince Frederick Charles was based, were incorrect, supposing, as they did, that the enemy's right did not extend beyond La Folie.

The Prince of Wurttemberg therefore did not obey the order to the letter, but for the purpose of acting in harmony with the general design of turning the enemy's right, ordered the 1st Division and the Corps Artillery to march across country in mass from Doncourt in the direction of St. Privat and Ste. Marie, and sent the 2nd Division, on its subsequent arrival, in the direction of Verneville. I myself witnessed how hard it was for this general, accustomed to unconditional obedience, to partly violate a strict order in the midst of battle. He reported

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his action at once. Later on, Prince Frederick Charles, having received further information of the situation, approved of the movement and ordered the greater part of the 2nd Division to follow in the same direction.

Just imagine the result, if the entire Guard Corps had marched on Verneville. The attacks on Amanvilliers would have been turned from St. Privat. There would have been a large gap between the Guards and the XII. Corps, which latter, marching on Auboué, Montois, and Roncourt, would have been isolated and exposed to destruction.

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With the battle of St. Privat the first decisive battle in the great war was ended. Adhering to the method agreed upon between us, I must now refrain from following further the historical events of this campaign.

## TWENTIETH LETTER.

### CONCLUSIONS.

It is quite true what you say, that in discussing the campaign of 1870 I have not only extracted the facts from the Official Account, but have also adopted the opinions and criticisms contained therein. Hardly any of the ideas advanced are entirely original, and nowhere have I expressed an opinion differing from those of the Official Account or implying the strategical disapproval of measures of the German army leaders. I will express myself more precisely. What I have written in the last five letters would almost appear as plagiarism from the first part of the Official Account. But I could not help it. You wanted me to write on strategy. I found there strategy and dispositions, to which I can take absolutely no exception. There was nothing to do, but to state my approval and to say "That is the way to do it." I admit, I might have expressed it more concisely by saying: "Study the detail of the direction of the German armies in 1870-71 in the Official Account, and you will gather the best theories of strategy, like fruit from the golden tree of life."

I will therefore end my letters on strategy here and leave it to you to study the Official Account in the same way as I have done it up to the 18th August, if you wish to read more of strategy. Pause frequently in your perusal, and think what steps you would have taken at this or that moment, had you been in the place of the commander of the French or German armies, and by comparing your ideas with the events you will deduce the best strategical lessons, as Verdy has illustrated so strikingly in his work:

If you desire to penetrate somewhat deeper into the domain of strategical details, as they present themselves to leaders of smaller bodies, I recommend to you the very interesting and instructive book of General von Willich, commanding the 22nd Division in the campaign of 1870-71: "Extracts from my Diary," published at Cassel in 1872. Ascertain the situation on each day, as it manifested itself to this general, especially while his division acted independently during the investment of Paris, then stop and decide what to do, and then read what he did and the result.

There is another reason why I may consider my observations on strategy as complete. I think I have roamed over the field of strategy in all directions and touched upon all its parts. Many a strategical truth has been repeatedly confirmed by the events of the three campaigns which we have discussed. Each one of them, as opportunity offered, was illustrated at least once by an example from history. Anyhow, if I look over Blume's book on strategy, which covers the whole domain systematically, I fail to find any subject not touched upon in our discussion of facts.

You have reproached me with not having sufficiently enlarged on the subject of pursuit, and perchance you charge me also with a deliberate sin of omission, as though the German troops were open to the accusation of not having followed up their victories sufficiently. And you think that I left this subject undiscussed, so as to avoid being at variance with, and to obviate blaming the leading of the German armies.

Still in recounting the events of those days of August 1870, we have discussed various phases of pursuit, and the greatest of them we discussed without calling it by that name. For what else were the battles of August 14, 16 and 18 than pursuits on a stupendous scale of a retreating army, and with the grandest conceivable result, the total



surrounding of the hostile army which eventually consigned it to captivity?

Blume speaks only of retreat and pursuit after a lost battle. But there is also a pursuit of an opponent retiring of his own accord, and this form of pursuit must be managed with far greater care than when the pursued has been routed. For in the former case an opponent retains his vigour and is ready any day to take the offensive, when a favourable opportunity offers or he has received reinforcements with which he surprises the pursuer. In this way Blücher at Laon sharply checked Napoleon.

Blume distinguishes between tactical and strategical pursuit. The former term he applies to the reaping of the fruits of victory by means of continuity of combat. It usually ends at dark; sometimes it is checked by fresh troops on which the defeated rally (Wörth). Blume also explains why tactical pursuit is frequently missing and how this is due to human nature. On the day after the battle the strategical pursuit begins, for the further movements of the victorious army must needs be arranged by the strategist. Hoepfner in his lectures distinguishes between direct and indirect pursuit. Direct pursuit seeks to reach the enemy by the straightest route, to keep him in motion, take prisoners and trophies, or at any rate to bring a retiring enemy to bay, to hold him, in order to defeat him again. Indirect pursuit usually chooses a route other than that taken by the enemy, seeks to anticipate him and cut off his retreat, or to cause him to fear such an eventuality so that he may never stop to offer resistance. If direct pursuit succeeds in bringing the enemy to bay it will depend on circumstances whether the indirect pursuit will at once throw itself upon him and take him in flank, or whether it will be able to take him in rear, aiming at his total destruction.<sup>1</sup> Both kinds of pursuit should be

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the best example of this in the 1870-71 war was the pursuit of Bourbaki after his defeat on the Lisaine which terminated by his being thrust over the Swiss frontier — ED.

undertaken at the same time, for a mere direct pursuit will ever encounter the front of the enemy's rear guard and would soon consume itself by frequent serious losses in frontal attacks. An indirect pursuit by itself, on the other hand, gives the enemy time to repose, to restore order and reinforce himself.

It is of course postulated, that the pursuer possesses a superiority of force, for either with the direct or the indirect pursuit he will have to engage the enemy single handed, until the other can participate. This excess of force (not only of numbers, but of combined numbers and efficiency) the pursuer will usually possess, otherwise the enemy would not retreat. If, by an exception to the rule, this should not be the case, and if a superior force should retire for some reason of its own accord before an inferior enemy, the latter would only be able to follow cautiously, but not to pursue.

Let this suffice for a definition of the system to be adopted in strategical pursuit. I dislike, however, any and all systems in strategy. Whatever leads to success is correct, as I wrote you once before. Permit me therefore to produce actual examples of what I have just stated.

After the engagement at Weissenburg the tactical pursuit produced no great results. One gun and 1000 prisoners were not much for such a victory. The reason was, that the strategical deployment of the army was incomplete, and the cavalry divisions were not available. We discussed that sufficiently in a former place. Strategical pursuit was omitted for the same reason. The force defeated hardly exceeded one division, and MacMahon's intact army was known to be directly in rear. Hence on the 5th August the Germans could only follow, not pursue, while the strategical deployment was being completed.

The circumstances regarding the strategical pursuit succeeding the battle of Wörth were similar, after tactical pursuit on the battle-field had yielded ample results and been stopped toward evening by fresh troops. To this

should be added, that these fresh troops barred the passages of the Vosges and prevented the German troops from gaining accurate knowledge of the disorganized condition of MacMahon's army. Anyway, as stated before, both conflicts of Weissenburg and Wörth were of a defensive character, although offensive in form, to protect the Rhine frontier from hostile invasion, and a partial pursuit could not bring about a decision that would be in harmony with the movements of all three armies.

After the battle of Spicheren was over, no pursuit took place on the same day. Night prevented a tactical pursuit and sufficient forces for strategical pursuit were not yet available. On the contrary, it was well known at German headquarters that on the 7th August three French corps stood in rear of the defeated corps of Frossard, and were in a position to inflict a serious check on the small German forces engaged at Spicheren, should they follow up the enemy precipitately and incautiously. It was first necessary to reinforce them from the rear before it was advisable to pursue.

The situation was similar to that after the engagement at Weissenburg, only on a larger scale.

When therefore on the 8th August it was decided at French headquarters to retire to Châlons, the Germans could do nothing but follow cautiously and not pursue until they had superior forces in the first line.

As soon however as the French changed their plan of retiring to Châlons, and gave the enemy time to assemble an excess of force, i.e. as soon as the French took position on the French Nied, they offered the enemy an opportunity. The latter did not allow it to slip by. The First Army took up the direct, the Second Army the indirect strategical pursuit. The French at once recognized that the advance of the German Second Army against their right flank would soon render the position on the Nied untenable, and they therefore retired to Metz. Then the German troops began the pursuit on a large scale. They clung to the heels of

their enemy and pushed the troops which constituted their excess of strength (X., Guards and IV. Corps) to the Mosel in indirect pursuit. The battle of 14th August is merely a battle in pursuit, fought for the sole purpose of stopping the enemy, who wished to retire, by frontal attack, bringing him to bay, interrupting and delaying his retreat, and giving the indirect pursuit time to cut the latter off. Here the direct and indirect pursuits co-operated quite systematically.

These facts at the same time demonstrate practically what is meant by "holding fast" an enemy. Looking at it from a theoretical point of view, one would think that if the enemy retires as fast as the pursuer advances, the former could never be overtaken or "held fast." In practice, however, things are different. The retreat has to pass defiles or is otherwise detained, as I stated once before, because the enemy in retreat must let his train pass on in front, whereas the pursuer leaves his in rear. As soon as both, pursuer and pursued, come in touch, the latter must make resistance if he does not wish to be ingloriously shot or cut down. This is the time for the pursuer to push on unceasingly and renew the fight. He must no longer act cautiously and weigh the relative strength of both sides, knowing, as he does, that assistance is coming to him and that the strategical pursuit will certainly compel the enemy in the end to resume his retreat. No harm is done if the attacking troops are temporarily checked, for a check must in the end be converted into success by the arrival of reinforcements, inasmuch as to "hold fast" the enemy will always bring about a strategical victory when coupled with the indirect pursuit.

Blume also enjoins caution on the pursuer in order that the success gained may not be changed into defeat. Up to 14th August, we see the German Supreme Command weigh with great care how to bring timely assistance to the direct pursuit, should it encounter greatly superior forces.

When it became plain, however, that the entire French army was beginning to retire through Metz, we immediately beheld inconsiderable advance guards and promptly forces of a ten-fold superiority. For all German troops brought to the battle-field on the 14th August did not amount to one-half of the opposing army. They knew that the French must, anyhow, retire in the end. What, under other circumstances, would have been rashness, was here timely daring.

You may say, that on the 14th August, the French army felt itself victorious, so that Napoleon wrote Bazaine: "You have broken the spell." But, even supposing the result to have been a French victory, it would not at all be inconsistent with what I have said, namely that under such circumstances, any temporary check to the pursuer's attacking troops would be changed into victory by the arrival of reinforcements and by indirect pursuit, because the enemy was "held fast."

The guns on the ramparts of the forts of Metz put stop to direct pursuit. On the 15th August, the forts separated the pursued from the direct pursuer, and that day, except a few cavalry conflicts, the Germans could only pursue indirectly. A large body of cavalry barred one line of retreat and four army corps crossed the Mosel on four different roads, parallel to the French line of retirement.

On the 15th August the German Supreme Command became convinced that direct pursuit had delayed the enemy sufficiently to lay his flank open to the indirect pursuit. Two corps were at once put in motion for that purpose toward the north the next day. They encountered the enemy, assailed him, and held the entire French army fast by the hotly-contested struggle of Vionville—Mars-la-Tour.

Once more (on the 17th) the commander of the German army gathered together quickly all available forces in order to inflict the final blow on the retreating enemy. The

orders for the 18th directed an advance in echelon from the left of the army to cut off the enemy's retreat entirely. It was successful and formed the strategical indirect pursuit, while the attack by the VII., VIII. and IX. Corps in the beginning of the battle may be styled the direct pursuit.

The result was that the enemy was entirely surrounded, and that his total destruction, which took place two months later, became simply a question of time.

Can you name any pursuit with grander results in the whole history of war in all ages? And this pursuit was undertaken against an enemy of which but a fraction had been defeated, while the major part had not been under fire before the 14th August, i.e. before the first battle. This pursuit fulfils all the rules laid down by theorists. It was carried out under much greater difficulties than after a great victory, since in that case the enemy would have been well-nigh incapable of resistance, as, for instance, the pursuit by Napoleon after the double battle of the 14th October, 1806, or by Blücher after that of the 18th June, 1815, where a simple following after the enemy sufficed to compel him to continue his flight.

You see, your opinion that the German armies did not sufficiently pursue in the last war, is not justified. Two weeks later they gained a similar result from pursuit after the battle of Beaumont, and of almost equal grandeur. You will now also withdraw your strictures on me for having passed over the subject of pursuit advisedly, so as not to place myself in a position to criticise adversely the leadership of the German armies.

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Allow me one more remark about the strategy of 1870 up to the 18th August, in order to deduce therefrom some practical lessons which occur to me.

We have seen that the causes of the first reverses of the French army lay in the mistakes made by their Supreme

Command in the first concentration—the strategic deployment—while the Germans made theirs correctly.

What was the chief cause of the errors of the French of the mistake of that same Supreme Command, which eleven years before, with great caution and timely perseverance, completed the strategical deployment at the right place before beginning active operations?

Wholly and solely, the fact that it was thought proper to deviate from the course which common sense dictated in order to make concessions to that phantom, public opinion, the misguided clamour of the Parisian street politicians. This same consideration induced the French Government to declare war much too soon and before preparations were complete. As early as the day after the declaration (20th July) the commander of the French army began to recognize that steps of a defensive character in the vicinity of Metz must be taken. But consideration for public opinion required that the first concentration of the army should bear an offensive character. Hence division of the forces and the placing of one army near Strassburg in an offensive, of another near Metz in a defensive sense.

The small offensive demonstration on the 2nd August which was to quench the thirst of the Parisian public opinion for news of victory, made it clear to the French leaders that for the present it could only think of the defensive. Common sense demanded a concentration of all the forces behind the line Meurthe-Mosel from Metz to Nancy. But considerations for the misguided clamour of the rabble in the streets of Paris prevailed over the demands of common sense or strategy. In view of this clamour, the offspring of mere vanity, a retreat was out of the question after the bombastically advertised victory of the 2nd August. The armies were brought to a standstill and scattered along the entire frontier, and the enemy was given an opportunity to crush them by superior numbers.

After the reverses of the 6th August, the only correct

resolution, that of uniting all the forces farther in rear, was made. The nearest point accessible to all was Châlons. Again the same consideration for internal politics forbade listening to the voice of reason, to the demands of strategy. The plan was given up the very next day for this one reason, that it was held advisable not to undertake such a long retreat at the very beginning of the operations. A position was taken up on the French Nied and the enemy given time to develop all his forces. This done, a retreat was made to Metz, followed by another halt until it was recognized that great speed was necessary to remedy the errors in the strategical deployment by a concentration at Châlons.

We saw that the French army at Metz might still have continued the retreat to Châlons, if not without some fighting and losses, yet without disaster, and might have effected a junction with MacMahon, provided the retreat from the position in front of Metz had here begun early on the 13th August north and south of the fortress.

Here an unfortunate accident delayed the continuation of the retreat. The fact that the bodily ailment, to which the Emperor afterward succumbed, should be so severe on this so important day (12th August) as to render a change in the Supreme Command necessary, caused, it seems, a delay of twenty-four hours in the issue of orders. This accident is one of those decrees with which Providence intervenes in the destinies of nations.

From the 14th August Bazaine lost all freedom in his strategical disposition. His will was not only opposed by that of the opponent, but he had completely to subordinate to it his views. He not only had to accept the law from the enemy, but was daily dominated by him and found his dispositions interfered with. A catastrophe became unavoidable. The "errors in the original concentration of the forces could not only not be rectified in the course of the campaign," but had as a consequence the complete destruction of the army.



The state of French politics the majority of the Government is in what I considered sound and in the consideration I had to show to the individual part of its own people were the main causes of the disaster of the first.

Bismarck gives scientific expression to such a condition of things. He may have had in mind the state of French politics in 1871.

Those politicians who oppose the government in things in principle should take a warning from example and desert at least in critical times from undermining the confidence of the people in the command of army, although it may appear to them as if the latter are taking the very best measures. The question is not now that the very best be done but that a surrogation be accorded to the one will which keeps *grand strategy* in view. We saw in the campaign of 1871 that even a strategy with which much fault may be found led to victory simply because it was in the hands of a will, which unflinchingly adhered to what it had recognized as sound.

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Furthermore, when I see so plainly how the strategic deployment bears within itself the germs of victory or defeat, the part which the individual plays, seems to

<sup>1</sup> The page referred to runs as follows:—

"We have already written about the connection between war and foreign politics, but internal policy also plays a considerable part in war. This chiefly arises from the fact that the strength of nations depends principally on their inward political conditions.

"These affect not only the strength, organization and rapid mobilization of the armies, but they also affect their use in military operations. A Government the power of which does not rest on sure foundations will require from the military commanders quick results, and will cramp their operations with regard to time and place. To fall back even if required by the military situation, will cause such a Government to totter. Again, a multitude of councillors will produce vacillation in the military leaders and affect the preparation of the means of conflict."—ED.

insignificant. For during the movement he forms merely a part of the cargo in the train, a small part in the great machine devoid of influence.

Nothing appears to me more ridiculous than the vain-glory with which individuals boast of the heroic deeds they have accomplished. What entitles them to presume that in a similar situation the enemy would not have done better, so long as success depends mainly on the Supreme Command of an army?

With all due admiration for the incomparable bravery with which our infantry climbed up and held the Rother Berg at Spicheren, with which the infantry attacked again and again at Mars-la-Tours, with which the Guards at St. Privat crossed the bare slope of 2000 paces to the village, and for all the other deeds of our gallant infantry, I cannot refrain from doing justice to the stubborn tenacity of the French, their bravery in attack, their steadfastness under distress when invested in Metz. That French colonel whom I saw at the battle of St. Privat three times ride along the front of his skirmishers at a slow pace on his grey horse, with arms akimbo, and who finally fell into our hands wounded, was not surpassed in intrepidity by any of our excellent infantry field officers. Who would presume to consider himself superior to the unfortunate but brave infantry of the old Imperial Army of 1870, because it was compelled to lay down its arms at Metz and march past him as prisoners? Who will assert that we should not have fared the same way, if the enemy had been led as we were, and we as the enemy?

No one could value more highly the deeds of our cavalry in the last war than I do. Of this opinion of mine I have given testimony publicly and privately, orally and in writing. Was it the merit of the cavalry that it had opportunities for such deeds? Did not the Supreme Command of our army, during the month of August almost daily, in writing and by telegraph, enjoin us to send the cavalry far to the front? The Official Account

gives us the orders in question. Was it the fault of the French cavalry, that orders from its superior authority continuously consigned it to the rear of the corps? The achievements of the French cavalry in the charges of Vionville and in the death rides of Sedan have proved how cheerfully it sacrificed itself, and leave no doubt that it would have shown equal devotion, had it been employed in the duties of security and information. Does the difference of success entitle the German horseman to shrug his shoulders contemptuously at the cuirassiers of the French Guards, because, forsooth, after brilliant charges ridden home on our infantry, in which half of the regiment was destroyed, they had to kill their magnificent horses for food, and surrender dismounted?

I am far from disputing the efficiency and devotion of the German gunners in battle. I was frequently witness to their steadfastness and had to reward those under my command. But I am also compelled to acknowledge the determination and devotion of the French artillery, which, on being silenced by our superior fire, again and again came forward and renewed the battle, as soon as our infantry formed for the attack on St. Privat.

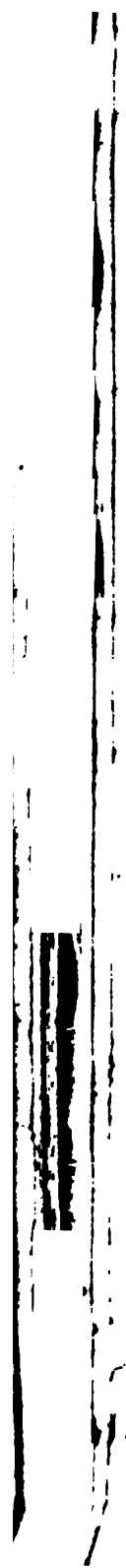
Therefore the knowledge that the strategical deployment and the subsequent direction, as carried out by the Supreme Command of our army, were the prime causes of success, should ensure modesty in judging of our own achievements, and caution us against conceit.

Modesty adorns the true artist, says the proverb. Our masters in the art of strategy have set us a shining example. Our exalted Emperor ever gave honour to God alone. His great strategical adviser answered, I am told, when asked what he thought of Benedek as a leader: "Had Benedek been victorious, he would have been asked what he thought of us."

Far be it from me to say, because the strategical deployment and the direction of the operations are of greater weight in turning the scale, that therefore the

quality of the individual soldier is immaterial. We have seen that the former is concerned with the forces on both sides, and that these are not dependent merely upon the number of combatants, but upon a combination of numbers and efficiency. Hence everyone should endeavour to improve himself in the sphere in which he is called to work, that in this calculation he may be of the highest value. Let each work incessantly in times of peace and as cheerfully as the Supreme Command of the army did, and is still doing, in preparing for the strategical deployment. Then will the nation in arms represent a force equal to one of twice its numbers. May everyone seek contentment in the consciousness of duty done, and not in the winning of laurels in which he has but an infinitesimal share. For then each will have done his part to preserve the German Fatherland in the position which it has gained for itself on bloodstained battle-fields, to the blessing and peace of all Europe, as the present situation proves daily.

END OF VOL. I.



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